

R U S S E L L :

A TALE OF

THE REIGN OF CHARLES II.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

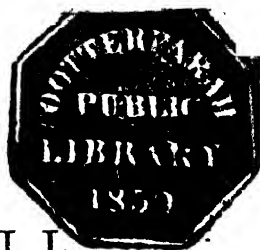
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R U S S E L L.

CHAPTER I.

"To the blue-eyed maid of the cottage!" said one.

"To the blue-eyed maid of the cottage!" said another, and so said a third and a fourth.

These words were pronounced in a large room lined with richly-carved, dark oak panelling. One side presented three windows, with narrow-paned lattices in lead and iron frames. In the centre was a sort of oriel, the glasswork of which ended about four feet, or rather more, above the general level of the floor; but an ascent of two steps conducted any one, who was inclined either to gaze out upon the surrounding scene, or to sit, and meditate or read upon the bench which ran round the recess, to a higher flooring, above which the window was raised not quite three feet.

In the centre of the room was a large square table, covered with plate and glass, rich viands, and choice wines; and at each side of that table was seated a gentleman in the costume of Charles the Second's reign, flaunting and glittering in silk and gold. Each had a page beside him, if possible more gaily dressed than his master. Merriment and revelry were evidently the order of the day; and, indeed, some excuse for excess might be found in the habits of the time, and the youth of the parties; for between the four who were there seated, they could not make up the sum of a hundred and ten years.

The gentleman who was placed at the side of the table next to the door, was apparently the master of the house; for he it was who gave orders to three or four servants who moved quietly about the room, and to an cider man, who kept his place by a large buffet loaded with jars of silver, and gilt drinking-cups, and basins richly chased. The other three gentlemen, who were apparently his guests, only addressed themselves to the pages, who poured out the wine,

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"To the blue-eyed maid of the cottage!" said the master of the house, raising high at the same time a large glass mounted on a tall stalk, and ornamented with flowers of gold.

Each of the guests drank the toast in the same manner, as I have said before; and then one of them exclaimed,—“This is not so good as the last flagon!”

“It is that you have drunk too much of it,” replied another.

“Let him change it,” said the master of the house; “the wines of the Garonne always seem pricked after the second glass. Give him Burgundy; it never palls upon the palate.”

“Everything palls on his palate, Alcester,” said one of the other gentlemen, looking across the table towards him who had condemned his entertainer’s wine; “he is an admirer of nothing, from the rose-coloured slippers of Mazarine, up to the lips of Stuart, and the stars of Heaven.”

“You had better have put in the garters too, Eserick,” cried another young man from the end of the table.

“I won’t believe it, Eserick,” said the young Lord Alcester, the master of the house; “no man at six and twenty has had time in life to exhaust its pleasures, and leave himself nothing but disgust and dull satiety. Contradict him, Beltingham, if you have got any spirit left in you.”

“Plenty of spirit,” answered Sir Frederick Beltingham, “but no contradiction, Alcester. Besides, the noble lord is right. I know nothing in life that gives me more than the very slightest shade of pleasure; but do not suppose for a moment that I regret it. This is what I have been aiming at all my life. From a very early period I looked upon satiety as the great end and object of all philosophy, or rather—for perhaps I use a wrong expression—it is the true philosophical state of the mind. The absence of desire and passion, that calm and even equipoise, where all things moral and physical are perfectly indifferent to us, and are merely regarded as subjects for the exercise of reason, is the state or condition which all philosophers have approved and aimed at, and which eloquent Cicero has ranked among the advantages which compensate old age for the loss of powers. Satiety for ever! Gentlemen this is my toast,—Here is to Satiety!”

“Nay,” cried Lord Alcester, “that toast I will never drink. Give me pleasure,—ever changing, ever new. May it never pall upon my taste; may it never weary; may it never fade; and, before it is exhausted, may I go out like an extinguished taper!”

“With a bad smell,” said Lord Howard of Eserick. “But tell us something more, Alcester, of this diamond you have

found in the dark mine—of this blue-eyed maid of the cottage. Is she so very lovely?"

Lord Alcester put his hand to his heart, with a jesting affectation of sentiment, and replied,—“She is divine! Picture to yourself, Escrick, a creature with a skin like alabaster, warmed by the rose,—Pygmalion’s statue just glowing into life; eyes large, soft and blue, with a long, sweeping fringe of jetty lashes veiling their too much light; small lips of pouting coral, the upper in the shape of Cupid’s bow, the lower like a cherry ready to be plucked; a forehead broad and fair, but not too high, with, waving round it, curls of nut-brown hair, dark in the deep recesses, golden in the gleams; a hand whose whiteness and whose taper fingers would render Hamilton envious; a tiny foot, that would make a fairy die of spleen.”

“And a figure of some five feet two,” cried Beltingham, “in a red bodice laced with black.”

“I hope and trust,” cried the gentleman at the other end of the table, “that, for the glory of the picture, she is neither as fat as Rubens’ Hebe, nor thin as Ann Churchill, when first she appeared in public.”

“Oh, no,” answered Lord Alcester; “she is at present perfect, Farleigh; no line that sculptor ever dreamed of grace is wanting in her form; and had the man of Greece but seen her, he would have sought no other model for Love’s mother, and Beauty’s queen.”

“On my soul, a prize for a king!” exclaimed Farleigh.

“Which a king shall not have!” cried Lord Alcester; “for she is my prize, and I will keep her.”

“Faith! I will report unto his Majesty,” said Farleigh, laughing, “that you have made booty, and not discharged the royal dues.”

“Then you shall taste twelve inches of cold iron for your pains,” answered Lord Alcester, in the same tone. “There is honour amongst thieves, Farleigh; and we thieves or hearts must not be more dishonest than those who cut purses.”

“No, no, no!” cried they all; “fair play, fair play, and the right of first discovery! But at all events you will let us have a peep into Paradise.”

“Not I!” cried Lord Alcester. “Why should I render you all miserable for ever?—But the wine halts sadly; and our meal too. What comes next?”—and he turned an inquiring look to one of the men at the sideboard.

“A *tourte à la reine*, my lord,” replied the man.

“Good faith! in this loyal household we shall need a glass of white wine to make that go down,” said the master of the

mansion. "Fill, boys, fill! His Majesty's good health and pleasure!"

The pages filled the glasses to the brim, and the meal proceeded towards its close in light and somewhat wanton talk. When near the end, however, Lord Howard of Escrick drank to the health of his noble friend, adding, "Long may he live to enjoy his new property, and see good neighbours flourish round him!"

"Good faith!" cried Lord Alcester, "I have few enough at present; the only one of any degree is my uncle Vipont, and he is so gloomy and morose, that I would as soon sojourn in a palace of ice as in his house."

"Ay, is the good lord gloomy?" asked Sir Frederick Beltingham. "I remember him gay enough, when I was a lad. He was one of Shaftesbury's men, and got his cousin's, Sir William Ellerton's, estates, when he was implicated in the plot. So he had every reason to be satisfied."

"He never seems satisfied now," answered Lord Alcester; "but when you visit him, whether you be friend or foe, stranger or acquaintance, he turns his dark eyes upon you, from under those overhanging grey eyebrows of his, as if he would cut your throat for coming near him."

"They say he did cut Ellerton's throat," replied Farleigh. "I recollect quite well there were strange rumours at that time."

"Pshaw, nonsense!" cried Lord Alcester, impatiently. "Pray, remember he is my uncle; and we do not cut men's throats to get their property."

"I never said he did," answered Farleigh. "You are too hot, Alcester; Sir William was a very likely man to quarrel with him for taking his estates, and might get his throat cut for his pains, without any reproach to your uncle. But, on my life! there is the sun going down; and I think, on the best computation I can make, we have four bottles more to drink before we part."

"Hark!" cried Lord Alcester, laughing; "on my life! there is a trumpet at the gates—are your swords all right, good friends? for that seems a warlike summons. See what it is, fellows; and let me know."

Two of the servants instantly disappeared from the room, and were absent for a minute or two. On their return the eldest had a laugh only half suppressed upon his face, but he bowed low and reverently, saying,—“It is a strange-looking man, my lord, with a beard half down to his middle, and two Moorish servants with silver rings upon their arms. He speaks an odd sort of language, and calls himself a professor of white magic. Moreover, he desired me to ask if your

lordship be inclined to see some curious experiments in his art. I never saw anything like it."

"Why, what did he do?" demanded Lord Howard of Escrick.

"He bade one of his black fellows throw a stone up to the moon, my lord," replied the servant; "and the man took up one as big as my fist, gave himself a whirl round upon one foot, and pitched it up into the sky. It went up, and up, and up, till I lost sight of it; and it had not fallen down again when I came away."

"Let us see him, let us see him," cried Lord Alcester, eager for amusement of any kind; but Lord Howard replied, "I fear we shall not have time; for Farleigh and I have to ride some twenty miles to-night, and he will never give up the flagon for the juggler."

"There is time for both," replied Lord Alcester; "a moonlight ride will do you and Farleigh good, cool your boiling blood, and send you to London as prim as Puritans. Take the man in, and give him and his blacks a jug of wine. We will see him by-and-by in the hall; and hark ye——"

He whispered a few words in the servant's ear, but repeated aloud, as the man bowed and withdrew,—"In the gallery, I say."

CHAPTER II.

THE large hall at Malwood was not less than forty feet in span, and fully sixty in length, with a high, vaulted roof, lined or ceiled with a thin boarding of pale oak planks, laid side by side, and supported by strong beams, which projected from the walls at the distance of about twenty feet from the ground, to sustain octagonal uprights maintaining in their position other cross beams above. The walls were of plain stone, with five long windows on one side, and two doors on the other; and the floor was of broad grey slabs, except at one end, where, underneath a gallery which crossed the hall at the height of about ten feet, oak had been substituted for stone. The gallery itself, with a sort of trellis-work of wood before it, resembled much one of those to be seen in the chapel of a nunnery, where the staid sisters conceal themselves from the world's view during the public service; and it led from one suite of private apartments to another in the two wings, the hall occupying a portion of the main building.

In the midst of the pavement, just about half an hour after sunset, was spread a large table, covered, as the chronicle says, with a fair white cloth; and on that fair white cloth appeared a number of curiously-shaped articles, some highly ornamented,

some perfectly plain, which excited apparently great interest in a group of male and female servants at one end of the hall. Several candelabra, and a large antique lamp of many wicks, burning with a peculiar blue flame, cast a ghastly light over the table and upon the countenances of two swarthy men, dressed in oriental costume, who stood at a distance from each other on one side of the table. Each held a naked scymitar in his hand, and both remained perfectly motionless, like two black statues, in the attitude of guards. Not even the eyes were seen to move for several minutes, and a dead silence pervaded the whole hall, except when the foot of some new comer, adding himself to the little crowd of servants, broke the stillness for an instant.

At length a sound of persons speaking, and noisy mirth, was heard, and the lord of the mansion, with his three gay friends, entered and moved towards some chairs placed for them at the distance of a few feet from the table. The strange sight presented by the hall, and the solemn stillness, seemed to have some effect upon them, for they suddenly became silent, and gazed over the preparations for their amusement with apparent surprise and interest. But, as they were taking their seats, each of the guards stretched forth his scymitar over the table, and immediately the sound of a trumpet was heard, evidently blown in the very room where they were; but nevertheless, though all looked round, no one saw who winded the blast. Instantly the door at the other end of the hall opened, and a figure appeared which attracted all eyes. It was that of a tall and exceedingly powerful man, in the prime of life, dressed in the costume of a period at least two centuries antecedent; and the tight-fitting hose and sleeves showed the athletic proportions of his limbs to the greatest advantage. His complexion was very brown, as if with exposure to wind and sun; and though the forehead, eyes, and nose, were all fine, the whole of the lower part of his face was concealed in a long black beard, which descended in curls almost to his waist. His hair had also been suffered to grow to an unusual length, and the jetty curls hung far over his shoulders. Indeed, neither scissors nor razor seemed ever to have touched hair or beard since he came into the world, any more than those of the Nazarite.

There was a slight, almost supercilious smile upon his face as he advanced; and all his movements were easy and graceful; but he saluted no one, and, approaching the table, placed himself between the two blacks, and gazed calmly over the party before him.

"Men love to see things in but one light, that which pleases them best," were the first words he uttered. "I love to see

under all," and passing his hand once or twice over the lamp, the flame became alternately deep red, bright orange, and pale yellow.

"Why, you all change colour!" cried the juggler; "but thus it is that men view the world, and believe everything to be an inherent quality, which is but accidental."

"Why, you are preaching, good man," said Lord Howard; "when we want to hear a sermon, we will go to church."

"If you went oftener, you might do better," answered the juggler. "I teach, but in another manner; and you shall know more of yourself before you go. But you must have a cooler head first; for you have drunk too much. The man who sits next you has drunk more, he next to him less, and the one on the left has brains more easily moved with cold thoughts than hot wine."

"Why, are you prophet as well as conjuror?" asked Farleigh, with a thickened utterance.

"You shall see," replied the juggler; "but now to other matters. Which is the master of the house?"

"Here he sits," said Lord Alcester.

"Ah, noble lord!" replied the juggler, "you are descended from a long line of glorious ancestors. Heaven send that you may keep well their high name! I see them all now looking at you."

"Where?" cried Lord Alcester. "I see them not."

"You shall soon see them," answered the juggler; "but they require to sniff fine odours before they will appear to any other eyes but mine:" and turning to one of the blacks who was with him, he spoke a few words, some of which seemed to the ears of Lord Alcester to be Italian, while the rest, though soft and harmonious, were utterly unlike those of any tongue he had ever heard. The Moor, however, instantly took from the table a small silver chafing dish, lighted the fuel beneath it from the lamp, and then placed it on the ground, near the wall in which were the two doors. The juggler then extinguished the other lights, and advanced, after having opened and closed several boxes on the table, and taken thence a quantity of different kinds of powders, which he scattered broad upon the fire in the chafing-dish. Large clouds of smoke of exquisite fragrance instantly began to roll over that side of the hall; and, retiring to the table again, the magician rested his left hand upon a large vase, and waving his right, exclaimed, "Appear!"

All eyes were bent upon the rolling vapour; but what was the surprise of Lord Alcester and his companions when they beheld figures of the size of life, first flitting amidst the clouds of smoke, and then marching on in solemn procession! Very

various were the faces which were seen, and equally so the costume in which the personages showed themselves. The first wore a hauberk of chain mail, and a hood of the same, covering, apparently, a steel cap. His face was turned away, and he passed slowly on, disappearing in the gloom at the other end of the hall. A number of other armed figures followed, the hauberk gradually giving place to plate armour; but two or three churchmen might be marked in the line, distinguished from the rest by their robes.

Lord Howard of Escrick laughed, with a somewhat broad jest, at the appearance of Roman Catholic priests amongst his friend's ancestors; but the juggler suddenly cried "Hush!" and the very next figure that presented itself,—a richly-dressed man in the costume of Henry the Eighth's reign—suddenly rushed forward towards Lord Alcester, with his arm raised as if to strike him. The young peer started up and laid his hand upon his sword, but the strong mellow voice of the juggler was heard exclaiming, "Back! back!" and the figure instantly retreated, and disappeared in the cloud.

"On my life! this is very strange," cried Lord Alcester.

"Mark, mark!" said the juggler; "you are coming near those whom you will know better." And two or three more figures swept past somewhat rapidly. At length there came an old man dressed in black velvet, with a staff in his hand; and the young lord exclaimed, "My grandfather, as I live!"

"Look now," said the juggler; and a figure was seen approaching from the right side, dressed as a cavalier at the end of the reign of Charles the First. Scarcely had he appeared, however, when he seemed to throw his cloak over the lower part of his face, and thus passed on with his head bent as if in grief.

"My father!" cried Lord Alcester. "Why does he hide his face?"

"I know not," replied the juggler, "but it is probable you do, noble lord."

"How should I know?" demanded the young peer.

"A father hides not his face from a son without cause," answered the juggler. "But these are grave matters, let us have gayer ones."

At the same moment the two Moors lighted the tapers in the candelabra again, and the juggler took a pack of cards from the table.

"You have often seen common conjurors," he said, "do innumerable tricks with these small bits of gilt and painted pasteboard; and you may have seen noble lords and honourable gentlemen play tricks with them also, as easy and not so innocent. But that is all trash. If you wish to see such as

those, my slaves here will play them for you. My mysteries are deeper. Take them and examine them well, and remark that there is no other pack upon the table. But, that all may be clearly seen, I will first have some of these things removed." He then again spoke a few words, in the same tongue as before, to the two Moors, who carried away the greater part of the vases and chests with which the table was strewed, leaving only one or two small objects behind.

The juggler then handed the cards to Lord Alcester, who examined them with his companions, and having satisfied himself that there was nothing unusual about them, placed them on the table again.

"Now," said the juggler, "know that these cards have a magic quality of telling men's characters. Let any one come forward and choose a card, but let him take care to draw a high one; for as he draws, so must we judge him. I have nought to do with it."

"You go, Farleigh," said Sir Frederick Beltingham.

"If you will come after," replied Farleigh.

"Very well," said the other; and with not the steadiest step in the world, the young gentleman advanced and drew a card from the pack in the hands of the juggler. It was the two of spades, and the juggler exclaimed, with a laugh, "The lowest card in the pack! But that is because you are half drunk. Try again, and let us see what you are when you are sober."

The young gentleman drew another, but the change was only to the two of clubs.

"Well, that is better," said the juggler. "Clubs are more soldier-like than spades. Now, let us see what you will be in love as well as war."

But the experiment did not succeed better this time, and it was but the two of hearts he drew.

"Once more," said the juggler; but Farleigh sullenly refused, and withdrew, amidst the laughter of his companions; for most men love more or less the ridicule that falls upon their friends.

"Now, Beltingham," said Farleigh, "it is your turn;" and with an easy self-possessed air, his companion advanced to the table, drew a card, and held it up.

"A knave," said the juggler aloud, "but that may only mean a shrewd man. Try again, noble sir."

It was again a knave. "The cards must be mistaken," said the juggler. "Try once more for certainty, and once more for luck."

Twice more did Sir Frederick Beltingham draw a card, with his usual air of indifference; but each time with the same result.

"These cards are very obstinate in their opinions," said the juggler, dryly.

"Well, it is better to be reckoned a knave than a fool," said Beltingham, and retired to his chair.

Lord Alcester then advanced, and first drew the seven of diamonds, then the six of clubs, then the eight of hearts, then the seven of spades.

"How read you that?" said he, speaking to the juggler.

"Nay, I know not," answered the other: "it would seem very uncertain—sometimes a little better, sometimes a little worse, and always about the middle of the pack."

"In medio tutissimus," said Lord Alcester. "Now, Escrick." But that nobleman refused to draw, saying, in a low bitter voice, "If you, gentlemen, choose to be insulted where you can take no revenge, you must do as you please; I will not expose myself to it."

In the meantime the juggler had cast the cards high in air, in a long stream like a comet's tail, but caught them again as they descended, without missing one, or even displacing their position in the pack; he then spoke a few words to his attendants once more, and sat down on a chair, which had been placed behind him, as if to take some repose.

"Is the farce over?" said Lord Escrick.

"No," answered the juggler. "It is just about to begin, and there will be an after-piece. These two men will show some things you do not often see, and I will show more when they have done."

On the various tricks and "tours de force" performed by the two Moors, I will not pause. They were wonderful and strange in those days; but are common enough in our own. When they were done, the principal juggler again advanced, and took a small round mirror from the table, saying, "If any man would see himself as he really is, let him come hither and look at the Mirror of Truth."

"I will try it," said Lord Alcester; "I have often wished to know myself as I really am."

"Then you will remark, my lord," said the juggler, "that the first image presented to you will be that which you are in your happiest moments, for the man moved by passion is not the same as the man calm and reasonable; the second image is what you really are when influenced by the evil which is in us all; the third, what you will become if you give way to that influence."

As he spoke, he held up the glass before the young peer, and Alcester beheld a fair reflection of his own face, with the features somewhat softened, and a gentle glow spread over the whole. The juggler then waved the mirror in the air and

presented it to him once more, when, to his surprise, he saw a face which he could not but recognise as his own, for it turned as he turned, but the features were all distorted; the mouth drawn on one side, the eyes out of place, and the cheeks seemed as if working with strong passion.

"This is very strange indeed!" he said; "may I take the mirror in my own hand?"

"Assuredly," replied the juggler, "but the changes will only take place in mine. It now represents the character who looks into it when affected by his evil passions."

Lord Alcester took the mirror and examined it all over. It seemed but a simple speculum of nine or ten inches in diameter, set in a thick silver frame with a back of the same metal. While he was looking at it, Lord Eserick's curiosity got the better of his resolution, and, taking a step or two forward, he looked over his friend's shoulder; but it was only to see a small part of Alcester's face reflected from the mirror, and almost the whole of his own, with a diabolical leer upon his countenance which made him chafe, the more because the features, though grinning and contorted, were still not to be mistaken. An angry look came over his countenance, which only rendered the reflection in the glass more horrible; and he turned away muttering, and resumed his seat.

"I can see no fraud," said Lord Alcester, restoring the mirror.

"Because there is none," replied the juggler. "Will you see the third stage, my lord?" and once more waving the mirror in the air, he held it up before the peer's eyes. It presented the face of an idiot, in which all resemblance to the original was lost.

"You go and look, sceptical Beltingham," said the master of the house; and with a sarcastic smile, the knight advanced and gazed into the mirror as soon as the juggler ceased moving it to and fro.

"A very good-looking youth, upon my honour!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, as he beheld his own handsome features unchanged in the glass. "But this is the fair side of things, master juggler. Let me see the worst."

Again the mirror was swung backwards and forwards in the air; and when again raised to the face of the spectator, it showed him still his own countenance, but with a squint which rendered it perfectly hideous.

"Bad enough!" muttered Beltingham. "Now the last stage, my good friend."

When he looked again, after a short pause, he started back, for he thought that one of the Moors must have been looking over his shoulder. It was the face of a devil he beheld, as

the imagination of that age painted the enemies of mankind. The juggler waved the glass slowly again, and laid it down; but Beltingham snatched it up, and gazed upon the polished surface. The last image was gone, and nought but his own features was reflected, with an expression of surprise upon them which he took care to banish speedily.

"Now, noble lords and gentlemen," said the juggler, "my task is done. Place in this cup whatever you may think fit for my reward,—no more, for I tell you that you will never see it again."

"From me you shall have nothing," answered Lord Howard of Escrick; "and you may think yourself well treated to escape from another sort of reward which you have really merited. Come, Farleigh, our horses have been at the gate this hour. Farewell, Alcester! If you took my advice, you would set that fellow in the stocks, with his two blacks to keep him company. Farewell!"

"Fie, fie!" said Lord Alcester, taking out his purse, as his two guests moved away; "these two gentlemen are half drunk, and still more angry; but I will make up for their neglect;" and he dropped some gold pieces into the cup which the juggler held. To his surprise, they made no sound; and the juggler reversing the cup, nothing fell upon the table.

"My lord!" said the man, as if in surprise; but the young peer shook his head, with a laugh, saying, "Pooh, pooh! I dropped five pieces in: and if by your art you have conveyed them anywhere else, you must bring them back again."

"Thanks for your generosity," said the juggler. "Now, noble sir;" and he held the cup to Sir Frederick Beltingham.

The knight took out his purse; but paused, saying, "I have a question to ask you first. I will follow you in a moment, Alcester. I would fain speak with this learned Theban alone, upon a point of science which he can perhaps resolve."

"So be it," replied Alcester, with a laugh. "Void the room there, fellows!" and walking away, he left his friend and the juggler standing together in the midst of the hall. The servants made haste to obey their lord's command. The juggler now speaking in pure Italian, bade his Moorish followers clear the table, and go forward on their way with the car, leaving his horse at the gate for him to follow; and Sir Frederick Beltingham remained perfectly silent till the hall was empty.

"Now, my good friend," he said, as soon as that was the case, "I have a notion that you know more of those things than other men. Either you deal with the devil, or you have

good information from other sources, and take much trouble to acquire it."

"I do know more than other men," answered the juggler, gravely; "but I neither deal with the devil, nor take trouble to acquire information."

"Well, it matters not to me," continued Beltingham, "which way you get your intelligence. I care not a straw whether it comes from the devil, or a gossiping old house-keeper, who is generally somewhat worse than the devil. It is some information which I want, and which you probably can give. If you do, I will double for you the sum which my friend Alcester has bestowed."

"And do you believe in the existence of a devil, young gentleman?" asked the juggler, with very marked emphasis.

"Certainly!" replied Beltingham, laughing; "it is the principal point of my faith. All other things seem very vague and dubious to me; but there are things so tangible to the ordinary faculties of man, that no demonstration of their existence is required; and amongst these is the fact that there is a devil, and that he is always at work,—more especially in the court of our sovereign lord the King."

"It is so," replied the juggler; "and he is more often near yourself than you are aware of."

"Perhaps you would insinuate," said Beltingham, in his calm, sneering tone, "that such is the case at the present moment. But pray limit your pretensions, my dear sir. Consider what a dangerous thing it is for a servant to personate his master. The devil is a very important potentate, and does not travel with a show-box. His functions are with great men in courts and camps; and I should fancy he does not spend his leisure hours in playing tricks for the amusement of country gentlemen."

"His functions are with all men," replied the juggler, "and at all times and places; for though not omnipresent, he is ubiquitous. From Heaven he is excluded; the rest of the universe is his large dwelling-place. His throne is man's heart; his crown jewelled with man's passions; his sceptre, pride; his footstool, vanity. I seek not to deceive you,—you deceive yourself; for, like all sceptics, you are grossly superstitious; and even now do doubt that my knowledge is not derived from the great enemy of your race. But I tell you it is not. The knowledge I possess is from sources within myself: no one informs me, no one prompts me; I know, and I speak what I know. Even now, if I so willed it, I could confirm your error, by telling you the secret thoughts of your heart at this very moment."

"It would be a new proof of your skill," replied Belting-

ham, interrupting him; "I should very much like to know what I am thinking of; for I am seldom fully aware."

"You are thinking of a woman whom, partly from passion, partly from revenge, you would seek to take from those with whom she now dwells," replied the juggler, "to make her a toy for the time, and then let her perish. You would ask me for instructions how to accomplish your ends; and while you sneer, you doubt; while you deny, you half believe."

"I beg your pardon, most humbly," replied Beltingham, putting his hand upon his heart, and making an extravagantly low bow; "you must be the personage of whom we have lately been talking; none other could look into my breast so clearly. But I trust your Imperial Majesty will be good enough to his humble subject and servant to give me some slight indication of the abode of this fair creature. I pray, recollect that though I am a visitor, I am not yet naturalised in your dominions, and that you must give some little encouragement to those whom you would bind to you for the long for ever. I know that this rare beauty is somewhere within a mile or two of this house, and suspect that Alcester has fallen upon a treasure without knowing half its worth. He will afford one not even a hint, however, of where she dwells."

"He is wise," said his companion: "neither will I. Farewell!—Of me you will hear no more; and now retire; for in a minute all will be darkness." Thus saying, he waved his hand over the candelabra, and, without other means, the lights went out in an instant, leaving the hall in complete night.

CHAPTER III.

It is not death alone which treads with equal foot the cottage and the palace. He has many companions on his weary march, many a harbinger and herald. Pain, sorrow, fear, anxiety, and care, do what man will, unlock the barred door, and enter. The latch of the low hut, the porter-guarded gate of princes, all give way at the dread summons of those comrades fell, and they come in to spoil the treasury of life, ere their grim king arrives and claims dominion over all.

Let us look at that cottage, reader, and see what it contains. It seems the abode of peace and tranquillity, as it rests in a nook of the woods, with warm sloping bank before it, and the stream rolling on within sight—almost within hearing—and the rosy light of evening painting the white walls with the hue of joy. Yet the old woman seated by the door ~~sings~~, and often turns her overflowing eyes to that beautiful

young being plying the busy wheel near the window—that creature of loveliness and light, to whom a purple ray from the setting sun comes softly through the lattice like a messenger from heaven. Yet the girl's face is calm, and high thoughts seem upon her brow and in her eyes. She surely feels no fears; and though her look is grave, yet it is not the look of sorrow.

"Fear not, fear not," she said, in answer to something gone before; "you make yourself unhappy with dread of things that are not dangerous."

"Ah, my bird, he comes too often," replied the old woman; "day after day he darkens that door with his proud shadow. Oh! what should I do if any ill were to befall you?"

"Why, surely you do not doubt me?" said the girl, raising the long fringes of her eyes and gazing at her companion.

"Oh no," cried the old woman. "I would as soon doubt Heaven, my child. But he is rash and daring. He might use violence, if thwarted."

"He dares not!" answered the girl; and plied the wheel again.

The old woman remained silent for several minutes, shaking her head with a grave and doubting look. "Ah, there is no telling, my pretty bird!" she answered at length. "In these times men dare anything. I have known them take a child from a mother's side, and carry her away to one of their houses, and keep her there for weeks and months as if she were a slave."

"I would find means to get out," said the girl, "unless they put fetters on me. But I have no fears. I dislike the man; I would rather he did not come; but yet I do not think he is bad enough to do such acts as you suppose. I can see very well that he is not one of those habitual losels of the court who have lost all sense of right and wrong. He takes their tone, and apes their manners, it is true; but that is only an affectation for fashion's sake. He may imitate their vices, too, but not their crimes, I think."

"Vices soon lead to crimes," replied the old woman; "but you know best, my dear."

"Well," said the beautiful girl in return, "I will tell you what I will do. If ever you see him coming near, tell me, and I will run the back way into the wood. I know every walk and path, and can watch there till he is gone. It was a luckless hour which brought him hither," she continued; "we have been so peaceful and so quiet for the last two years, that I was in hopes the storms were passing away. The death of the old lord, his grand-uncle, has been a loss to all the country, but to none so much as us. Would he had lived a little

longer, poor old man! or would that this one had remained in London, which is the place most——”

“There, there!” cried the old woman; “he is coming up the stream.”

The girl instantly rose—quickly, but yet with a quiet grace seldom seen even in the highest ranks. There was no flutter, no rustle of her garments; all seemed easy and gentle, even in her most rapid movements; and as she caught up a black wimple, which lay upon a stool near, and cast it over her head, the rounded arm, the taper fingers, all fell into lines of beauty that well justified the description of her which Lord Alcester was at that very moment giving to his loose friends at his own table. She paused not to look in the direction towards which the old woman’s eyes were turned, but passing through a small door and the kitchen behind, ran lightly along under a hedge-row which marked out the cottage-garden, and gained the shelter of the wood.

In the meanwhile a single figure walked slowly up the stream, with arms crossed upon the chest, and head bent down till the feather in the hat dropped almost over the eyes. There seemed to be something deeply interesting to him in the flow of those quiet waters as they ran clear over their pebbly bed, showing the many-coloured stones beneath, like jewels in a crystal vase. Once or twice he paused, as if to contemplate some more rapid part of the current, or some deep pool, and then he would raise his head for a moment ere he walked on, give a glance at the sky, or the scene around, bend down his eyes to the river again, and proceed upon his way.

When he looked up, the countenance displayed was fine and striking, the features beautifully cast, and somewhat small, except the forehead and the chin, the former of which was both broad and high, and the latter somewhat large and prominent—not perhaps to an excess, but yet sufficiently so to give an expression of firmness and vigour to a face which, in its general proportions, was almost too delicate. The eyes, eyebrows, moustachios, and hair, were almost black, and the hue of the skin was of a deep brown, slightly, but very slightly, warmed with red. In height he was somewhat above five feet ten, and perfectly well-shaped, though if anything too thin. His dress, with the broad sword-belt, fringed with gold, crossing his chest from the right shoulder, denoted him a person of some consequence, but there was nothing like pretension in his air; and as he walked along he seemed thinking of ought else on earth but himself.

Not far from the cottage a little foot-bridge spanned the stream; and a path led from it—formed naturally by often-

passing feet—to the door near which the old woman was sitting, crossing, as it did so, a good horse-road, which ran between a small town and a distant village. Up this path, and towards the road and the cottage, the young man turned when he came to the bridge, without raising his eyes, for the country seemed quite familiar to him. But where the foot-path crossed the road he lifted his head, just as he was turning to the right, and gazed straight into the cottage.

The old woman's eyes were fixed upon him, and a nervous twitching of the hand showed that the sight moved her apparently with alarm: but when the stranger's face was fully seen, her agitation became so great that she broke the thread she was spinning, and let the distaff fall.

The young man suddenly stopped, gazed at her eagerly, and walked straight up to the cottage-door. The old woman rose, and with shaking limbs dropped a low curtsey.

"I have seen you before," he said, eagerly—"surely I have seen you before! Your name is Martha Hennage, is it not?"

"Yes, sir—yes, my lord," replied the old woman, "my name is Martha."

"Why, you seem frightened, Martha," said the young gentleman, extending his hand to her: "do you not know me?"

"Oh yes, Lord Francis," she said. "I know you fast enough."

"Then, why are you frightened?" he asked. "Ay, ay, I know, or at least I can guess; but there is no cause for fear, Martha; I have had no share in what other people have done."

"I am sure you have not, my lord: I always was sure," replied the old woman. "But, dear me! when I think, it is very sad; and to see anything of the family puts me quite in a tremble. The Lady Emmeline passed me one day on the road; she did not see me—she was on horseback; but I thought I should have dropped."

The young gentleman had seated himself on a stool near her, and leaning his head on his hand, seemed buried in thought; but when the old woman stopped, he said, in a sad tone, "Poor Emmeline! You little know, Martha, how much she has suffered. Her happiness has been destroyed by the very same events which have brought ruin to your own people. But you should feel no fear at seeing her—or me either, indeed. Where is Lady Ellerton? is she in Westminster?"

"Oh no, Lord Francis; she is in Paris, trying to move his Majesty by favour of the King of France."

The young gentleman's lip curled slightly, and he shook his head saying, "Vain, vain! The King, perhaps, she may move, as a poplar leaf is moved by a breath of wind; but can she move the people of the country from their madness, or another from his schemes? It is the worst quarter in which she could apply. Is Gertrude with her?"

"I believe not, my lord.—No, my lord, she is not;" and the old woman again began to tremble.

"Where is she?" demanded the young nobleman.

"I really cannot say; I do not know just at this moment," answered Martha Hennage, with agitation but too apparent.

"Say rather that you are forbid to tell," rejoined her visitor.

"Well, my lord, it is so," answered the old woman, partly recovering her courage. "You know I must do as I am bid."

"You must," he answered. "But yet, my good woman, I might be told with safety. You should know, and Lady Ellerton should know, that I would sooner lose my life than do anything that could injure her."

"Yes, Lord Francis; but her father thought so of others as regarded himself," rejoined Martha Hennage. "And you know——"

"Hush, hush!" cried the young nobleman, "you will drive me mad;" and rising from the stool, he quitted the cottage and walked down into the road. Then suddenly pausing, he remained in thought for a minute or two, turned back to the cottage door, and said, "I will write to Lady Ellerton. Will a letter addressed merely to Paris find her?"

The old woman hesitated, but then replied, "I believe it will, my lord;" and then the fixed and searching look of the young man's eyes brought the colour into her faded cheek. He turned away again without a word, thinking she was purposely deceiving him; but ere he had taken five steps down the slope, with a sudden start he wheeled round, mounted the little rise rapidly, and, passing along under the hedge-row, entered the wood.

While this had taken place at the cottage, the beautiful girl who had left it but a few minutes before pursued her way through some of the varied paths of the wood, gradually mounting the hill upon the slope of which it was planted. When she had gone a couple of hundred yards from her home, she slackened her pace, and then feeling in security, sauntered quietly on, enjoying the gleams of sunshine as the slanting rays poured in here and there upon the mossy banks. At the distance of about half a mile from the cottage she sat down upon the trunk of a felled tree, and after gazing out for

a minute or two between two bushes which framed, as it were, a fair landscape of the distant country, lighted with golden rays, the heart of youth poured itself forth in song :—

“ Is there but one gleam in life,
One gleam of happy light /
Must clouds of care and storms of strife
Endure till all is night ?
No, no, no ! There is joy in store.

“ Is every pleasure but a dream,
Whence'er we wake that flies ?
And earth's existence but a stream
Of dark realities ?
No, no, no ! Love and hope are more.

“ Love shall last though thwarted now,
And glow in its own fire.
Hope shall raise her living brow,
When all things else expire.
Ay, ay, ay ! till grief itself is o'er ”

She paused after the low notes, soft and sweet as those of the nightingale, but more subdued, had ended, and then rose up to return, seeing the sun's verge touch the low hills that bounded the prospect. But suddenly she heard a step close to her, as if some one had been waiting near and listening ; and with some terror—though she was not by nature fearful—she hurried down the path. Alone, in the wood, with the sun setting, she might well feel some alarm ; but it grew stronger when the quick step followed close. She ran, and her heart beat fast, her breath came quick ; but the pursuer ran too. A hand clasped her arm, but gently—very gently ; and a voice, once most familiar and most dear, cried, “ Gertrude ! Gertrude ! Fly not from me ! ”

She covered her eyes with her hands, and sobbed ; but he drew her gently to him, and cast his arms around her, holding her to his heart with an impulse that could not be resisted. She wept, and hid her eyes upon his bosom ; but she uttered not a word ; and with eager haste, which nearly defeated his own object, he tried to soothe and calm her.

“ Dearest, dearest Gertrude,” he said, “ why should you fly from me ? Why should you seek to conceal yourself from one who loves you more than life ? Hide yourself from all others if you will, my Gertrude ; but not from me, with whom your secret, if it must still be kept, shall be as safe as with yourself. Nay, safer ; for I will watch over you and guard you as I would a sister in peril.”

“ Oh yes, Francis ! ” she cried, raising her eyes with a timid glance to his face ; “ you must keep that secret as the most sacred thing on earth. Promise me you will—that

to no one, not even to Emmeline, you will reveal it. Do you promise me? If not, I must fly and seek another home."

"Of course I promise," he replied. "Be calm, my love; not by the most remote hint that I even know where you are concealed, will I violate your confidence—not by a word or look when you are named, my sweet, dear cousin, will I betray my acquaintance with your dwelling-place. Will that satisfy you, my Gertrude? If not, but tell me what will, and I will promise all. But you will not doubt, dear girl, that I will keep my word. Why did you fly from me, love?"

"I knew not that it was you, Francis," she answered, gazing at him with a faint, sorrowful smile. "Perhaps if I had, I should not have had strength to fly; and yet it would have been my duty to do so, for I promised my mother to remain concealed from all of you. I thought it was another. I never dreamed that it was you, for I heard that you were far away."

"What other did you think it was?" asked her lover, remarking something peculiar in her tone. "No one has injured you—no one has insulted you here?"

"No, no," she answered; "but he has been thrice to the cottage since he came down, and I wish to see him no more; for his words and manner please me not. Good Martha saw him coming up the stream, and I ran away into the wood to avoid him: still he has never done ought to give me cause of offence."

"But who is it, Gertrude?" said her companion. "You do not name him."

"It is this young Lord Alcester," replied the fair girl; "he who has just succeeded to his grandfather. While the good old lord was living we dwelt in peace. He never inquired who inhabited the cottage. Retired altogether from this busy world, he spent his later years in preparing for another, by doing good in his own neighbourhood, and all passed in order and tranquillity. But since his death, there has been much revelling at Malwood Hall, drunken servants and followers quarrelling and wrangling even to blows, at the very church door, and riot and confusion all over the neighbourhood."

"So Alcester is down here?" said her lover, musing; "I fear, sweet Gertrude, this will not much longer be a place for you. Why is it,—oh! why is it, love, that I must not hope you will make my dwelling your home? that you will not give me the best and strongest right to protect and support you?—why did your mother write to me that letter, thinking to put an end to hopes for ever, which will never die but

with life, my Gertrude? She cannot—I am sure she does not—believe that I have had any share in the wrong done to you and yours; and yet she punishes me for a father's fault. Still, dear one, I have rights which I will not yield. The joy of calling you mine she may deny me; but no power on earth shall prevent me from protecting and defending you. As your cousin, as your once-promised husband, I have a title to do that, and you must not deny it to me."

"I will not, Francis," answered Gertrude Ellerton, after musing for a few moments; "you have claims upon me,—oh, yes! and I will admit them as far as I dare. You will not, I am sure, ask me to fulfil a promise made under a sanction that is now withdrawn; but still you have strong claims under it, Francis; claims to everlasting love, attachment, and esteem; and you shall protect me in case of need; you shall watch over me, if it can be done without discovering my secret to others. I see not how it can be, indeed; for if you come often hither—and I fear you will, Francis—inquiries will soon rise up, which may be painful to you, and terrible to me in their consequences."

"Fear not, dear love, fear not!" replied her companion, "I will so frame my schemes that none but you shall know of my coming or going. See you I must, my own sweet Gertrude; but I will not hazard aught which can betray your abode to others; although I perceive not, nor can conceive a motive, why it should be concealed. Neither the harshness of the law, nor the wild fanaticism of the vulgar mob, nor the fierce policy of the firebrand Shaftesbury, would affect a gentle girl like you, even if his power were not passed away, and the fury of the people abated."

"Oh, Francis! ask me not questions that I must not answer," said the lady; "let us go back to the cottage, for it is growing dark, and I will tell you all that I may tell; but promise me, in return, to ask nothing more."

"Nothing but what is needful for your safety," answered her lover; "but with Alcester and his loose comrades near at hand, I shall be uneasy till I have taken means to ensure my Gertrude against insult and annoyance. Injure her I think they dare not, or at least they would not dare if they knew her rank and station."

"There is no cause, Francis," replied Gertrude, "to make yourself anxious on that account. His presence may be an annoyance, it is true; but I do think as one demeans oneself to others, so are they likely to demean themselves in return; and I will take care that he shall have no pretext for one word that can be offensive towards me. A simple yes or no

has hitherto been all that he has heard from my lips, and he will hear little more."

The young nobleman held her hand in his, and gazed at her with a doubtful smile. "Alas! my Gertrude," he said, "you little know how small ceremony is shown by the nobles of a libertine court to the mere peasant girl. Alcester, I believe, is not bad at heart; and, indeed, that he has not insulted you already is some proof of it, as the world goes; but I must have better security for you than his forbearance, or than any effect that cold demeanour can produce on him, and such as he is. I will take care of that, however; but it will need thought and care to make your security compatible with the concealment you desire. Now let us into the cottage; and, closing the door, enjoy one hour of sweet, uninterrupted intercourse, as in other days."

The cottage door closed upon them, the rude boards which served as shutters to the casement were put up and fastened, and for nearly an hour Lord Francis Vipont, or Virepont, as the name was written of old, sat beside Gertrude Ellerton, talking over other days, and hearing some detached portions of one of those sad tales which were common in England at a period when two low and infamous men, Oates and Bedlow, serving the passions and designs of one higher but not more worthy than themselves, in defiance of law, reason, honesty, and truth, and armed with nothing but the prejudices and the fury of a fanatical party, brought many an honoured and noble head low, made the property of the wealthy, and even the powerful, a prey, and sported with the laws of the land and the rights of Englishmen. Her father's name Gertrude never mentioned, but she told how she and her mother had lived obscurely in London, in poverty, and almost in want, after the sequestration of their large hereditary property, still striving to mitigate the rigour of their adversaries, and save a portion, at least, of the wealth which had once been theirs, till at length the final blow was struck, the estates declared confiscated to the Crown, and made over, not without corruption, to the father of him who sat by her side. On the latter point she touched lightly, out of tenderness to one whose spirit she knew had burned to see his own parent not only refuse to support a cousin and a friend against a false accusation, but take open part with his persecutors. She then went on to tell him that her mother had gone to France in the hope of employing some influence which she possessed at the court of Louis, as a means of working upon the mind of the enthralled and pensioned King of England, to make some atonement to a family whom he himself well knew to be innocent of the crimes with

which its head had been charged. She had at first proposed to be absent but a few weeks, but weeks had grown into months, and months into years, in her hopeless suit, and her daughter remained alone in England, waiting her return, in a lone cottage, as a peasant girl.

Such is a summary of the parts of her story that she told, and Francis had much to say, also: how he had inquired, and searched, and hoped, and at length despaired, but loved and remained constant still.

The servants and the horses which he had sent on when he dismounted to walk up the stream, waited long for him at the place where he had appointed them to meet him, and the men began to feel some alarm. At length, however, he appeared, sprang into the saddle, and was riding homeward, when some sounds peculiar and unpleasant met his ear, coming from the neighbouring park. He stopped to listen, but he heard no more, and, spurring on, overtook shortly after a strange-looking car, something like a Roman chariot, with two men in it, whose faces seemed in the semi-darkness to be quite black. They were proceeding slowly along the road, and, passing them at a quick trot, he pursued his way.

CHAPTER IV. :

THERE are moments when the tumult even of joyful thought becomes painful, when the heart requires to stop and pant as if from a race. Such was the case with Gertrude Ellerton after her lover had left her. She had seen him whom she had not beheld for more than three long years, whom she had loved so dearly, whom she loved so dearly still. To do so, she had violated no duty, she had broken no promise, she had nothing with which to reproach herself in the pleasure that she felt. The joy was pure as it was full, but it was overpowering. She could scarcely believe that it was true. She repeated over and over again, as if to assure herself of the reality, "He has been here! He has been seated beside me! His hand has pressed mine, and his arms have held me to his heart!" It seemed a wild dream of delight; and when the door had closed behind him, she felt like one waking from slumber, with all the objects of busy life still dim, confused, and indistinct.

For several minutes she sat with her hand pressed upon her eyes, that she might still in fancy enjoy the blessing of his presence, that she might not see that he was gone, that she might dwell upon the sweet thoughts he had left her. He

loved her still as warmly, as fervently as he had loved her in days of yore.

There was no change, no alteration, there were the same glowing words, the same tender looks, the pressure of the hand, the kiss with its ineffable endearment. It was too much almost for thought.

Her old companion, who had been the nurse of her young days, stood and gazed at her with a smile of fond affection, but with a sad look, too; and after a while she broke in upon her thoughts, saying, "Ah, dear child! it has made you very happy to see him—and it would make me very happy too, for your sake, if it were not for thinking what my lady will say—then, if any harm should happen of it?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Martha," replied Gertrude. "What can my mother say, but that God willed it? Here we have remained two long years undisturbed, and neither you nor I could tell that he would pass here to-day. He found me—I did not seek him; and I know my dear mother would not reproach me for that which I could not help, although, when he did come, it has given me joy I little dreamed of when I went forth into the wood. However, I will write to and tell her all immediately, so that she may know the whole, and direct me how to act."

"But suppose some harm happens first, my bird," said the old nurse, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"What harm can happen, Martha?" asked the lady. "Did you not hear him promise that he would tell no one, and was the word of Francis Vipont ever broken?"

"No, I know he is a good young man," replied Martha; "but all young men are thoughtless."

"But he is not," answered Gertrude, boldly; "he is as wise and prudent as he is good and true. If I would place my whole happiness for life in his hands, surely I may trust him in such a thing as this—but I will go write to my mother."

She had scarcely risen from her seat, however, when the latch of the door suddenly rose, and some one pushed hard, and then knocked on finding it locked.

"Who can it be?" said Gertrude, in a low tone; "ask, Martha, ask. I will run into the other room, for I will see that man from the hall no more."

"Who is it that knocks at this late hour?" said Martha, approaching the door and speaking through it.

"Let me in, for Heaven's sake!" answered a voice from without; "I have been badly wounded by a number of ruffians, and I must staunch the blood which is draining my life away."

"Ay, but you may be a cheat," said Martha, "and wish to get in to rob us."

"I am no cheat," replied a voice, faintly, "nor robber either. In Christian charity let me in, and help me—look from the window and you will see."

"Let him in, Martha, let him in," cried Gertrude, advancing from the room behind; "we must give help, if we would hope for it."

"Nay, but dear lady," said the old woman, "suppose——"

"I will run the risk," answered Gertrude; and with her own hands she drew back the bolt, and unlocked the door.

The moment that it was open, a man who stood without, apparently of three or four and thirty years of age, threw off a horse's bridle which was over his arm, and with a slow step entered the cottage. He was covered with a wrapping cloak which concealed his dress, but the long glossy black beard and hair falling in curls over his shoulders, seemed to show that he was not a native of the land; and both Martha and Gertrude drew a step back and gazed at him with some surprise.

"Thanks, thanks," he said, seating himself in the old woman's chair near the door. "I am not badly hurt if I can stop the bleeding of the wound."

"Where is it?" cried Gertrude, approaching; for she saw clearly by the bloody print of his footsteps on the floor that the tale of his being wounded was but too true. "Here, bring the light, Martha."

"First close the door and bolt it," said the juggler; "I have put them to flight, but they may return. 'The wound is here, fair creature,'" he continued, raising his eyes to Gertrude's face, and throwing off his cloak, while the old woman fastened carefully the door: "here, close by the right arm. The sword has cut some large vessel. Look and tell me, whether the blood flows forth in an even stream, or with a sharp pulse."

"Let me undo your vest," said Gertrude, untying the loops with eager and trembling hands, and throwing back his gory shirt collar. "With an even stream," she added, when his broad chest was exposed, "but strong and dark."

"Then there is no great harm done," said the juggler. "Have you a kerchief, bright creature?"

"Yes: here, here," said Gertrude, taking one from the table.

"Now, tie it tight round my arm, as near the shoulder as may be," continued the juggler. "Tight—tighter—tighter still. There, do you see? the blood stops instantly."

"I have some vulnerary balm," said old Martha, "pre-

pared by my dear lady's own hands: a sovereign remedy for all cuts and wounds."

"Three strips of plain waxen plaster were far better," said the juggler.

"That you can have, too," rejoined the old nurse; "I always have some ready, in case the dear child should cut her hand."

"Prudent precaution!" said the juggler; "but fetch it quick, good dame, for the wound still bleeds a little, and this tight 'kerchief' numbs my arm."

The old woman ran into the other room, and when she returned, the juggler looked up to Gertrude, with a smile, saying, "Now, if those fair fingers would close those gaping lips, which in ten minutes more might have let out my life's last drop, while the good dame cuts some strips and holds them to the candle till they are soft, you will have performed a cure worthy of a surgeon of renown."

"Had I not better pour some balm on first?" said Martha, with the bottle in her hand.

"No, no," answered the juggler; "the blood is the best balm; for it is of nature's own preparing."

The old woman seemed a little mortified; but, nevertheless, the strips of plaster were soon cut and warmed, and with them the lips of the wound drawn close together and fastened with a covering over all.

"Now slacken the 'kerchief a little," said the juggler, "a very little, that we may make sure the blood flows in its own channel again, and does not leap forth like a schoolboy at his play hour. There, that will do;—methinks it is quite stopped."

"It would seem so," answered Gertrude; "but yet I should fear that any movement of your arm would make it break out again."

"Nay, I will fight no more to-night, if I can help it," was the juggler's reply. "The pitiful villains! to set six or seven of them upon a single man!"

"But what became of them?" asked Gertrude; "and how did you escape?"

"Two of them were in the river when I left them," answered the juggler; "one I think will not use his right hand again for fifty years at least; and another has a cut across his nose and cheek, by which you will be able to know Lord Howard of Escrick to the end of his days."

"Lord Howard!" exclaimed Gertrude; "and did a nobleman really do so base an act?"

"Ay," said the juggler, "noble men will often do very ignoble acts—especially the slaves and sycophants of a court."

The way it happened, as well as I can divine, was simply this : He ordered his lackeys to beat me with their whips; and finding that four were not enough for that, and that two of his men were down, he and his friend charged me with their swords."

"But what was the offence?" asked Gertrude.

"The greatest offence of all to a great man or a courtier," answered the juggler. "Truth, bright creature! It is the touchstone to judge men's qualities by; I always try it upon new acquaintances, and I will essay it with you before I go."

"I fear it not," answered Gertrude, with a laugh. "To be told the truth can never do us harm."

"And yet it may be fearful to hear," rejoined the juggler.

"Not to me," said Gertrude.

"Well, then, slacken the kerchief a little more," cried the juggler, "and bend down your ear."

Gertrude did so; and, as soon as she had loosened the handkerchief and fastened it again, her strange guest whispered a word or two which caused her to start back with an exclamation of surprise, and a cheek suddenly pale.

"What said you, sir?" she exclaimed.

The juggler put a finger of his left hand to his lips, and replied, "I told you truth, fair lady. No masquerade can blind my eyes, Gertrude Ellerton."

"Gracious mercy!" cried old Martha. "What manner of man are you?" But the juggler made no reply, for he was sitting with his eyes bent down upon the floor in deep thought.

Gertrude and the old woman stood and gazed at him: the one with a look of intense inquiry, the other with the mere expression of wonder; but at length the young lady laid her fair hand gently on his arm and said, "Will you not tell me more? You who know so much can go further still."

"I can and will," replied the juggler, "for it is necessary. At the present moment, indeed, I know not well how to act. It is nearly six miles to the neighbouring town. If I mount and ride away, this wound, with the slight stress upon it, may break forth again, and yet there are those who expect me, and will wonder at my absence if I stay."

"Oh, good sooth! you cannot stay here," cried Martha, warmly. "We cannot have a man abiding in our cottage all night, master. That were unseemly."

The juggler laughed. "By my faith! good woman," he said, "your reputation would be in sad peril to keep me, and your strength would be more than it seems to send me forth, if I were pleased to stay. Methinks, however, what may best

your lady may befit you; and I have a word or two for her private ear, after which she shall herself decide. Pr'ythee give us a little room. This chamber is somewhat close for three."

"Go, good Martha, go," said Gertrude, "light the lamp, and take it into the other room. There is some metheglin and some barley bread. Let us have it presently. This gentleman has need of refreshment."

"Metheglin and bread!" said the juggler, musing—"but poor food for such as you, sweet lady; but still many a noble lip has tasted worse, and I shall be thankful for both meat and drink."

While he was speaking, old Martha lifted the lamp and withdrew, muttering, "Well, bird, well! But I do think old heads should cool young counsels."

Gertrude heeded her not; and remained alone with the juggler till her good nurse's patience being exhausted she re-entered uncalled for, bearing the viands for which she had been sent.

"Then I will remain," said the visitor, as the old woman entered. "Doubtless my people will comfort themselves, and wait till I come; for they have gold in their pockets, and will fare well. 'Good cheer maketh men forget old friends,' says a country proverb; and my course is so often erratic, that they will not fancy me dead or lost if I remain absent from them one night. Put yourself to no trouble for me, however, dear lady, for this chair is bed enough for one night; and I have often slept on worse."

"No, but you are wounded," said Gertrude; "it will be easily managed to lodge you better. In that little room behind—the kitchen of my palace—there is a bed where my good Martha sleeps. For this night she shall sleep with me, if she does not mind; and you shall have repose to let your wound close quietly."

"Oh, I mind not, my bird," answered the old woman to the part of Gertrude's speech that referred to her. "It is not the first time you have slept with me, God wot! Many a time you have lain upon my arm when you were not much more than two spans long; but what I do not like, is to have a strange man in the house all night—with such a beard, too."

"The beard will not hurt you, good dame," said the juggler; "and to me it does much good. I thought not, when I nursed my budding moustachios as a raw lad, that they would ever prove so serviceable to their master; and as to having a man in the house, he might, perchance, prove a more useful piece of furniture than a wooden horse. This

lady has tended me kindly—I owe her much; and Christian charity goes never unrewarded. But I can be grateful, too; and I vow before Heaven that I will not rest satisfied till I have done her some good service. You laugh, good dame," he continued, advancing to the table, and taking up the barley bread in his hand. "You laugh, as if you thought I should never have power to serve her. But mark me, I am no ordinary man, and I will find some occasion to aid, protect, or befriend her, as sure as you put a golden guinea in the heart of this barley loaf."

"I put one! Lord 'a mercy! the man's mad!" cried the old woman. "I have not seen one for this month, and shall not till the grocer at Wincombe sends us our little pittance, from my lady, on Saturday night next."

"Do you dare to tell me," said the juggler, gravely, "that when you kneaded the dough you did not slip a guinea in? Well, your lady shall be the judge. Take the knife yourself, and cut the loaf across and across. Mind you make it an exact cross, and you will see whether I be a true man or not."

Old Martha snatched the bread sharply from his hand, and cut it partly through; but when a little beyond the middle, the edge of the knife struck against something hard, and she began to shake.

"Cut from the other side," said the juggler; and when she did so the loaf fell in two, exposing a gold piece imbedded in the crumb. Poor Martha remained for a minute gazing in silent amazement at the two halves of the loaf, which she continued to hold apart in her trembling hands, while Gertrude watched her, smiling.

"It is fairy gold!" she cried at length, dropping the bread upon the table.

"It is a good sound guinea, coined in the blessed Martyr's reign," replied the juggler. "Take your money, my good woman, and give me some bread."

"It is not mine, sir," replied Martha, with a reverent tone. "How it got in I cannot tell."

"Yes, it is yours," answered the juggler; "trouble yourself not as to how it came there: but for the future, remember men with long beards can do more than other men, though they cannot bear hunger and thirst; and I suffer both."

Gertrude sat down to the table, and gave him the bread and the metheglin mingled with water, for he would not taste it plain; and, after remaining almost silent for a quarter of an hour, the juggler took some of the fragments of the bread, and going to the door, opened it, and whistled. A horse's

head, beautiful in shape, and with a fiery eye, was instantly thrust in, searching in his hand for food. When it had eaten the bread, he loosened the saddle-girths, patted it kindly, then spoke to it in a strange tongue, and immediately the beast cantered off, the sound of its steps tending to the wood above.

"It is strange," said the juggler, turning into the cottage again, and bolting the door, "in what occupation a busy mind will find employment when deprived of its accustomed objects. In teaching that fine beast to understand me almost like a child, I have solaced many a weary hour—but I will not detain you from your rest, dear lady. It were well, my good Martha, if that blood upon the floor were washed away ere morning. As for that without, it will rain hard before morning, and all will be clear. Would to God that all blood unnecessarily shed could be so easily effaced! Good-night, Gertrude."

Old Martha lighted him to the room beyond, and then returned, eager to ask questions; but Gertrude had already ascended the little wooden stairs which led direct from the front room of the cottage to her chamber above. The good old nurse seemed inclined to follow, but two matters detained her below for a few minutes. First, she washed carefully out all marks of blood from the floor, and from the wooden chair on which the juggler had at first been seated; and she then looked wistfully at the guinea, which still lay upon the table. She had many doubts about it; but she thought there could be no harm in examining it more closely, and she took it up. It looked bright and shining, and felt heavy, and yet pleasant in the hand. The guinea found its way into the large pocket at her side; and then she slowly mounted the stairs, after seeing that the door was quite secure.

CHAPTER V.

It had rained hard from midnight till towards four o'clock in the morning. It was not an ordinary rain, for it came without one indication of an approaching alteration of weather apparent to any but eyes accustomed to watch the most minute signs of meteoric change. The sun had set in splendour; the faint clouds which crossed the sky here and there hardly hid a ray of his departing light; the gold predominated over the purple; no watery beams tinged the zenith with red; and the wind at even-close was to the north. Towards eleven, however, the breeze shifted to the south-west, and began to sigh and sob like a hysterical girl and

thick and fast the soft masses of vapour rolled up, hiding the moon and stars. Then began to fall thin, small drops, the advance-guard of the storm, and the blast shrieked amongst the trees as if tormented by the watery demons that rode it through the world. Down, sweeping and pattering, and hissing on the parched ground then fell the torrents of rain, beating loudly at doors and casements for entrance, and bubbling on the surface of the agitated stream. From the hill-side poured forth torrents loaded with leaves torn off by the ruthless storm; and on every flat meadow or even piece of road, large pools were formed, before the thirsty earth could drink up the moisture for which it had longed for weeks. Still the wind howled in fierce and sudden gusts, sinking down and then starting up again in fury, like a newly-caged wild beast; and Gertrude, as she lay and listened to the tempest, thought of the wanderer without a home, the houseless beggar, the child of want and woe, and raised to heaven for others the voice which in dire distress had often pleaded for herself and those she loved. She might feel that—even impoverished and deprived as was her house, fallen from high estate, and deprived of long accustomed wealth—many comfort and blessings were still left to her and hers, but she could not enjoy them when she thought of how many suffered even then. Towards two in the morning, however, there came a lull: the gusts of wind grew more gentle—softened down—subsided; and nought was heard but the low murmured falling of the rain, and the musical dropping of the eaves. Slumber stole over the sweet girl's eyes again, and she dreamed of him she loved, and was happy.

At four the rain ceased, and shortly after the sky grew grey; light mottled clouds flecked the wide expanse overhead; and soon, catching the early rays of the yet hidden sun, they glowed in the rose-coloured light, like the plumage on the breast of some strange beautiful bird. The vapour ascended lightly and fast, and by the time that the sun began to pour the full tide of golden splendour down the valley, not a trace of storm was to be seen on high.

Not so on the earth. There, vestiges of the tempest were found everywhere; in the turbid and rushing stream, lately so limpid and soft—in the scattered leaves and fragments of broken boughs—on the hill-side channelled by water-courses and strewn by washed-down sand. The grass, too, almost white with the load of drops, as if a hoar-frost had fallen upon it, showed how the rain had come down, first heavy and large, then soft and thick; and the still-dropping trees told that the clouds had not long passed away.

As the morning advanced, a new change came over the

scene. The sun gained power; the trees ceased to drop; the river worked itself clear; all seemed bright and fresh, though the abundant moisture, rising in a thin vapour, brought a filmy veil over the lower valleys, softening all the features of the landscape. The birds, too, broke out in song, and the whole world was musical.

It was not much after six when, with a slow and sauntering step, Robert Lord Alcester approached the cottage inhabited by Gertrude Ellerton, and tried the door. It was close fastened, however, and he walked away; but he went not far. Seating himself on the railing of the little bridge, he waited for the rising of the cottagers; and his fancy painted Gertrude in her morning beauty, fresh from the reviving power of sleep. For a moment or two he would gaze into the water as it hurried past, but ever and anon he raised his eyes to the cottage to catch the first sight of her for whom he felt a growing passion. He heard the window of the upper room open, and looked up; but he saw not Gertrude, for it was closed again immediately. He waited a little longer with some impatience for the opening of the lower window and the door, but they remained shut, and walking up at length, he lifted the latch and knocked for admission.

"Who is there?" demanded the voice of old Martha Hen-nage.

"It is I, Lord Alcester," answered the young nobleman.

"Well, lord or no lord, you cannot come in at present," was the reply; and with pride somewhat offended, he paused by the door, saying to himself, "I will get in, at all events."

He heard persons moving, and voices speaking low within; and he began to think that he was not so favoured a visitor as he wished to be. Then his impatience mastered him again, and he knocked once more, saying, "Open the door, good woman, I wish to speak with you."

"Wait a minute, then, my good lord," said Martha, slowly taking down the rude shutter from the lattice; "you come mighty early of a morning!" and with tardy steps and long delay she at length approached the door and opened it.

When the peer entered, he saw before him the lovely form of Gertrude taking her spinning-wheel from the window, as if about to begin her daily task; but his first feeling of irritation found voice, and he turned somewhat haughtily to Martha, saying, "You were very slow in giving me admission."

"I never yet did hear," answered the old dame, boldly, "that I was bound to open my own cottage-door to any one, be he lord or simple man, a minute before it suits me."

"Pshaw!" said Lord Alcester, with a laugh, "you have

grown sour with time, good dame. Here are sweeter looks, and, I trust, sweeter words. How goes it with you, pretty mistress Alice?"

"Well, sir, I thank you," replied Gertrude, seating herself, and taking the thread in her hand.

"Nay, leave that dull work, and take a better task in hand."

"I know no better task, my lord," said Gertrude, coldly, "than doing what is my duty to do."

"But a poor duty," said the peer, approaching and sitting down beside her. "A pleasanter task, methinks, would be to come forth and take a walk with me this bright morning. The world has put on smiles, after the tears of last night; as a lovely creature like yourself, after pouting at her lover's freedom, laughs gay forgiveness at him from her radiant eyes."

"My lord, you are a gentleman of high estate," said Gertrude, in the same tone she had before used, "I a poor girl of very humble degree. It befits not you to take walks with me, and still less me to walk with you."

"Love levels all degrees," said Lord Alcester, gazing at her tenderly.

"It must be mutual love, then," answered Gertrude, "which is not the case here."

"Oh, let me try to make it so," said Lord Alcester; "for no woman whom I ever beheld have I felt what I feel for you." But the peer was interrupted suddenly.

"What, not for Henrietta Compton?" said a shrill voice, apparently speaking in at the window, and ending with a low laugh.

Lord Alcester instantly started on his feet and darted to the casement; but all was clear before the house; the grassy slope, the stream, the meadow by its side, the cross road and the path, were all before him, but no human form was to be seen. "It is strange," he said, returning; "I thought I heard some one speak."

"Perhaps your own conscience, my good lord," replied old Martha; "for I am sure a man's conscience ought to sting him when he comes labouring to mislead and ruin an innocent girl like my poor grandchild."

"Mislead and ruin her!" cried the nobleman, "I would sooner ruin myself! I seek to lead her to happiness and splendour; to make her the queen of my heart, and the mistress of my household and my fortune. What though a mere form—an idle ceremony be wanting, I will bind myself to her by all vows that it is possible for me to take, and be constant to her through life."

"As constant as you have been to others," said the same

voice which had before spoken ; seeming this time to come from the door.

Lord Alcester darted out and walked with hasty steps round the cottage. He could see nobody, however, and he returned irritable and gloomy.

"Is there anyone in that room?" he demanded, pointing with a quick gesture to the opposite door.

"No!" answered the woman, boldly; "but I should think it was little business of yours if there were."

"I will see, at all events," replied Lord Alcester; and striding to the door, he threw it open. The room seemed perfectly vacant of any human thing; and returning to Gertrude's side, he sat and mused sternly for a minute, and then resumed the topic of his love, saying, "I offer you, dear girl, all I have to give—wealth, pleasure, a heart that loves you with unceasing devotion and affection."

"With dishonour and shame!" answered Gertrude; "but, my lord, it is in vain——"

"Hush! hush!—hear me out!" cried Lord Alcester. "How many a girl of far higher station than yourself would rejoice at the bare prospect of what I now propose? If I wed you not at the altar, you shall have my most solemn vows, and a bond under my hand for a dower which might befet any lady in the land; you shall have wherewithal to enrich this good old dame, and spare her all labour and anxiety for ever; and you shall possess my whole heart and affections, and rule my conduct as a queen. Why do you smile so scornfully?"

"Because, my lord, as I told you, it is all in vain," answered Gertrude.

"In vain!—why so?" cried Lord Alcester, trying to take her hand, and pressing closer to her side.

Gertrude rose and drew back, giving him a look of indignant contempt. "You force me to speak harsh words," she said; "it is not only in vain, but worse than in vain;—it is insulting; and I see I must speak plainly, that I may not subject myself to further offence. Understand, then, Lord Alcester, that even were not your proposals odious and degrading, you yourself are personally disagreeable to me. Did you offer me your hand, poor and humble as I am, I would reject it; with less scorn, perhaps, but as much firmness, as I reject the base offer you make."

Lord Alcester had risen also, and her look and manner stung him even more than her words. Love and anger, however, are perfectly compatible; and her exceeding beauty, heightened by the flushed cheek and sparkling eye, seemed to increase the passion which he felt, even while she repelled him. The desire to punish what he called her insolence, did

not at all shake his determination to possess her by any means, or at any price; and the knowledge, too, that in conversation with his libertine companions, he had boasted she should be his, drove him resolutely on his course.

"So, so, proud beauty!" he exclaimed, "you have well learned the value of your charms, it seems. I have heard you to an end, now hear me. You shall be mine! I will find means to bow that haughty spirit, and show you that my station is not to be scorned and insulted by a cottage girl, however fair she may be. Willing or unwilling, I tell you you shall be mine; and you shall think yourself happy if by any skill you can retain that love which you now contemn. Come up to Malwood Hall at five o'clock this evening."

"I certainly will not," replied Gertrude.

"Then I will come and take you," said Lord Alcester; and do not think to escape me; for every avenue to your dwelling shall be so guarded that flight will be impossible. I give you till five to make up your mind, to soften your tone, and to bend your proud spirit. But if you are not at Malwood Hall by that hour, I repeat, I will come and take you; and at the same time, I will find and punish your excellent prompter without, if he be upon my lands, be you assured."

"I do not believe you, my lord," replied Gertrude, with a pale cheek; "I do not believe you would violate the laws of the land."

"I will violate no laws," said Lord Alcester, with a meaningful smile; "you shall have no hold upon me there, lady, for aught that I do. You are upon my estate here, as a tenant, paying no rent, and have been so for two or three years, I understand. This must be inquired into; and, until it is, you sojourn safely at Malwood Hall."

"What you say is not true, you bad lord!" cried Martha. "This is not your estate; neither this cottage, nor the ground on which it stands, nor the garden, nor the green sward before the door. I hold them of better people than you."

"It is possible it may be so," said Lord Alcester, assuming a cold and indifferent tone; "but all that must be proved in law; and until it is, I shall keep this pretty bird as a sort of hostage, to insure that I am not wronged. Before this fair suit between us is decided, methinks I shall have time to tame the wild, fluttering thing. Think better of it, Alice,—think better of it," he added, approaching nearer to her, and speaking in a low voice; "cast not away the heart that loves you; drive me not to do things abhorrent to myself; but ever remember that I swear before Heaven and earth you shall be mine, and you cannot, and shall not escape me."

"A strange way of winning love, indeed!" said Gertrude, turning away.

"You leave me no other," replied Lord Alcester. "Did you not treat all kind words, all soft persuasions, all generous offers, with scorn? What other way was left me to try but this?"

"True," she answered; "whatever way you tried would be equally tried in vain; and so will you find this, Lord Alcester. You may wrong me; you may keep me as a prisoner; but you cannot make me your slave. The moment I am free I will have justice; and in the mean while, you only pile upon your own head more hatred and more contempt."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried the peer, with a forced laugh; "we shall see, my pretty mistress!" and, turning from her, he quitted the cottage.

The moment he was gone, Gertrude ran and closed the door, bolted and locked it. The lattice also was shut by the old nurse; and then they both hurried together into the room behind, and with a key, produced by Martha from beneath the bed, opened the door through which Gertrude had passed the day before into the wood. Between it and the similar one which led into the garden, was a space of about three feet, and from this place of concealment came forth the juggler with a faint smile upon his countenance.

"You have heard," said Gertrude, laying her hand confidently, almost affectionately, upon his arm,— "you have heard all?"

"I have, dear lady," he answered. "He is worse than I thought him; and depend upon it he will keep his word. Men are ashamed of being virtuous; seldom, if ever, of being vicious; and for fear a licentious comrade should laugh, this weak youth will risk even a crime to gain his object."

"But what can I do?" exclaimed Gertrude, with grief and anxiety on her face and tone.

"Oh, fear not,—fear not!" answered the juggler; "we will frustrate him, dear lady. It is well, indeed, that I remained the night."

"Ay, that it is!" cried old Martha, who now, in terror and distress, was glad to lean upon anything for support. "I never thought to see the day when my dear young lady would be insulted and threatened before my face;—a wretched, profligate fellow!"

"But how can we frustrate him?" asked Gertrude, almost at the same moment, still gazing in the juggler's face. "I see no means. I am at his mercy. How can I even fly, if he

surrounds the house with his servants? And if I could fly, I have no money to carry me away.—Yet I would sooner beg my bread from town to town than be carried up to that hateful house.”

“Be not afraid!” said the juggler. “Fly indeed you must; but you shall pass his people,—ay, or himself either—uninjured and unknown. I think, Gertrude, after our words of last night you will not fear to trust me,—I will not say as a father, for I am too young for such a title,—but as a brother, much older, and alas! far more experienced. You must go with me:—not now, not at once! but I will come back to protect and watch over you in a few hours. Then be prepared to go; and before that time I shall have thought of some asylum for you where you can be at peace; for you must not share my roaming life a moment more than needful.”

“But you told me——” said Gertrude, and then paused.

“True,” replied the juggler; “but we have not time to seek advice from that quarter where there is a better right to give it. We must, however, as soon as may be, give intelligence of whatever change we make. Only one thing is certain: here you must, and ought not to stay longer; and any other inconvenience—ay, danger, even, is better than the risk you run here.”

“It is,” said she, musing; “it is; and yet——”

The juggler gazed at her with a look of grave inquiry. “You hold back something from me, lady,” he replied. “Give me your confidence, Gertrude; for so far, at least, I merit it, that if to lay down my life in your service were required of me, I should not hesitate. Give me your confidence then, fully.”

“I will,” answered Gertrude, “I will. You know that there is one very dear to me, one who must ever remain so.”

“What, Francis Vipont?” said the juggler; “none can better deserve to be dear. What of him, Gertrude?”

“Yesterday, by mere accident, he discovered my abode,” replied the lady.

“I had nought to do with it!” cried Martha. “The dear child fled into the wood, just at eventide, to get out of the way of this bad man who has been here to-day, because I thought I saw him coming; but that was a mistake; for it was Lord Francis. But I would tell him nothing. After that he met her amongst the trees and came back with her; but I had nought to do with it.”

“Nay, there is no harm done,” said the juggler; “you might trust to him as you would to your own father. Poor Gertrude! you were joyful to see him again, I will warrant.”

“I was indeed!” replied the beautiful girl.

"And he?" said the juggler.

"Seemed as happy to see me," answered Gertrude. "Some words I let drop raised his suspicions of this Lord Alcester, who is his first cousin, as you know; and he promised he would take measures to protect me without revealing to any one that I am here; especially not to his father; for you know he is the object of my dear mother's greatest dread. I doubt not Francis will be over here early to-day.

"The distance is considerable," said the juggler; "but if he comes you must tell him all."

"I shall fear to do so," answered the lady; "lest I provoke a quarrel between him and the other."

"True!" was the reply. "But yet," the juggler continued, after a moment's pause, "you ought not to conceal the motives of your going from him. Between you and him there should never rise up a shade of doubt or suspicion; but you can show him, Gertrude, that any explanation between him and his cousin, Alcester, must inevitably lead to the betrayal of your secret. That, his own sense of honour will prevent him even from risking. Tell him all, Gertrude, if he comes in time; if not, we must give him intimation as soon as you are in some degree secured against further insult. But at all events be prepared when I come, which will be within four hours."

"And what is to become of me?" asked old Martha; "am I to go too?"

"No, you must remain," replied the juggler, with a smile, "and endure, for a season, the wrath of this noble lord; but I doubt not, when he finds that the object of his pursuit has escaped him, his indignation will not fall very heavily on you."

"I do not know," said the old woman, with a very apprehensive shake of the head: "he is a terrible man; and besides, I promised my dear lady never to leave the sweet child till she came back. Ay, well-a-day! she thought to be back in two months, and it is now more than two years."

"It is the hope delayed which maketh the heart sick that has kept her," the juggler answered. "I am not fond of promise-breaking, my good dame; but all promises are made under the condition that it is possible to keep them. In this instance your young lady must away, and for you to go with her is impossible, for where one might pass two could not; but so far as this you shall keep your word. As soon as may be you shall follow her;—this very night, if they will let you pass. We must take care, however, that they do not track us by your course. You mentioned a man at Wincombe who sends you money monthly, the savings of poor Lady El-

leton from the pension allowed her by the French court. Come to his house as soon as you can find means, and you shall have information there as to our abode.—Stay, you may want money for your journey. I am a rich man, God wot! Here are two more guineas for you."

"I do not know whether to take them or not," said the old woman; "I fear they are not rightly come by, sir. I mean no offence; but I did not like those voices this morning at all. You could not be in the cupboard and before the window at the same time; and so it must have been somebody else's voice: and I should like to know whose it was."

"It was the voice of a good friend of yours and of your lady's," replied the juggler; "who, if that young lord had gone much further, as there was some fear, would have cast him from the cottage door like carrion. So take the money and fear not;—it was honestly obtained, without the intervention of the devil in any shape, which is more than most men can say of their wealth.—And now, dear lady, I will bid you farewell. My wound, thanks to your gentle care, though somewhat stiff and bad, as needs must be, is in a fair way to heal; and in a day or two I shall look upon this blood-letting as a good service done by a rough surgeon." I go straight hence to Wincombe, where my men are waiting. Should aught go wrong, let me hear there, and you shall soon have deliverance; but I shall be back ere four hours are over."

"Had I not better keep the doors tight shut till your return?" asked Gertrude.

"No, I think not," replied the juggler; "I would seem busy with my ordinary occupations, as if you treated his threats as idle brags. So will he be less upon his guard against your escape. But I will crave, before I go, one-half of that good brown loaf to feed my poor barb, who has been munching wet grass all night. It is a good beast, and loves to be fed by his master's hand."

Cutting the bread into thin slices, the juggler opened the back door of the house and whistled as one would for a dog. At first all was still; but at the third call some lightly-trotting feet were heard; and down from the wood, with head erect, and glistening eye, came the beautiful grey barb, snuffing the air with its wide nostrils, till, making a circuit by the hedge-row, it approached, and thrust its mouth into its master's hand.

Gertrude stood by and watched with pleasure; but still there was a thoughtful air about her; and at length she raised her eyes to her strange visitor's face, saying, "You think, then, there is no choice for me but to fly? I only ask,

because I promised my mother to remain here; and I would fain feel sure that absolute necessity drives me forth."

"This man's conduct were enough, sweet lady," replied the juggler, tightening the saddle-girths; "but if you seek a further reason still, I will give you one:—Sir Frederick Beltingham is at Malwood Hall."

Gertrude turned very pale, and exclaimed, "Then Heaven help us!"

"He is here; and knows, by some means, that you are near," replied the juggler. "I need say no more, I think. Had not mischance brought me to your door last night, I should have been with you early this morning, to warn you and protect you. Farewell, then, for a time; but fear not,—no harm shall happen." Thus saying, he mounted his horse and rode quickly away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE fine old mansion called Malwood Hall was very quiet and silent at the moment when its lord went forth to visit the cottage inhabited by Gertrude Ellerton. Most of the servants had been brought from London; for on succeeding to the title and estates of his grand uncle, Lord Alcester had not thought fit to retain many of the old domestics of the family. Some few indeed remained, and they were up and at their labours before he rose; but the rest, accustomed to the negligence and irregularity always generated in the households of a great city, had not troubled themselves since their coming to the hall, to quit their comfortable beds till many an hour after the summer sun had risen.

Lord Alcester had not even summoned his own peculiar valet, though the intimate connection between France and England at that time had rendered an appendage of the sort as indispensable at the dressing table of English gentlemen, as the soap or the *eau d'arquebusade*. But he did not wish his going forth or his coming in to be remarked by any one, and more especially, not to be noticed by the guest who had accompanied him from London. It generally happens, however, that those from whom we most wish to conceal our actions, are those who first discover them. So it was, at least, in this instance. Sir Frederick Beltingham was up, dressed, and at his window, when the peer went forth, and like young Norval, "he marked the way he took." But the guest did not pursue the investigation of his host's movements any further, in person. His own valet stood by the table rearranging the various articles of the toilet: a quiet, little, noiseless man, serviceable in many things.

"Preston," said the knight, "come hither."

The man was at his side in a moment, without a word. "Look there," said his master, pointing through the window to the receding form of Lord Alcester, "follow him without his seeing you; mark where he goes to: return as soon as you see him returning, and when you are back ring that bell," and he pointed to one that stood upon the table.

"Yes, Sir Frederick," replied the man, and it was all he said.

"Do you know when Mistress Compton rises?" asked his master, as he was retiring.

"She sleeps little, sir," replied the man. "She is already up. I saw her in the gallery walking to and fro."

He paused a single instant; but his master added nothing more, and the man retired.

Sir Frederick Beltingham waited only long enough to allow his valet time to descend the stairs, ere he himself quitted the room, and took his way along the corridor and through the monastic-looking gallery which crossed the great hall. It opened, in the other wing, into a wider gallery, one side of which was enriched by fine pictures from the hands of Van-dyke and Rubens. At the further end was a lady in what was then justly named a night-dress; for at that period there was in reality a toilet for the night, though afterwards, be it remarked, the so-called night-dress was merely the first dress which a lady put on in the morning. Her back was turned towards him, and she seemed busy with her own thoughts; for her head was bent, and her eye fixed upon the floor. She heard not his approach till he was close to her; and then with a quick start she turned her head, and gazed at the intruder upon her solitary reveries. She was very beautiful, but evidently care-worn; all the features were fine; and the expression of her face, especially of the large dark eyes, was noble and sweet, but very sad. A look of much surprise came over her countenance, and a crimson glow rose in her pale cheek when she saw Sir Frederick Beltingham: and well it might be so; for with studious care, partly from feelings in her own breast, partly from the commands of Lord Alcester, she dwelt in his house almost as if she were not there. None of his guests ever beheld her, except by some extraordinary accident; the short walk in the grey of the morning, or after the sun had gone down, was her only taste of free air; her own apartments were her abode during the whole day; and there, no one but one of the servants ever ventured to present himself, except when Lord Alcester himself took his meals in the little hall appropriated to her use. With care and shrinking timidity she strove to hide herself, and her

unhappy position from every eye; and in sadness and solitude passed her hours, except when with forced gaiety she strove to retain the waning affection of her betrayer. Sir Frederick Beltingham she had seen more than once before; first, in the days of her innocence, and once shortly after she had fled from her mother's house with Lord Alcester; but from that time forth she had never beheld him, although she knew that he was often in the same house with herself. Perhaps there were few of all the guests who came and went whom she would have less desired to see, for she disliked and dreaded him; and fancifully attributed to his counsels the breach of all her seducer's solemn promises to herself. Whenever Beltingham was there, it seemed to her that Lord Alcester became more cold and loveless; it might be imaginary, but still she thought she saw a sharper manner, another gloomy shade over the warm and glowing love which he had once expressed and felt. Beltingham's sudden appearance, then, filled her both with painful memories and anticipations of evil. She was a lady, however, by birth, by education, and by feeling; and she received him courteously, though somewhat coldly.

"I have much wished to speak with you for some time, Mistress Compton," said Beltingham, with a soft and somewhat sad look; "and hearing from my servant that you were in the gallery, I thought I would intrude upon you, as no other opportunity might occur during my stay."

"You are welcome, Sir Frederick," answered the lady, "what may your commands be?"

"It has deeply grieved me," said the knight, "to find that my friend Alcester has not treated you as he ought to have done."

"I make no complaint, sir," replied the lady, "and were I to complain, it should be to himself, not to others. In a word, Sir Frederick Beltingham, I look upon Lord Alcester as my husband, and shall ever do so. I shall act towards him as his wife, however he may act towards me; and it is not a wife's duty to complain to strangers of a husband's conduct."

"Ay, that is the very point," said Beltingham, "what I blamed was, that he did not make you his wife—as he promised, I think."

He put the proposition somewhat doubtfully; at least so his tone implied; and the lady clasped her hands with a look of anguish, saying, "Indeed, he did. He promised: he called Heaven to witness, that if I would fly with him he would wed me immediately. He was then, as you know, Sir Frederick, a poor private gentleman, in no way above my own

degree. So far from it, that my mother opposed even my marriage with him; and this gave excuse for the scheme he suggested, and which has proved my ruin. I fancied when I stole forth to join him, that I was going from my mother's house to the altar; but when once I was in his power—left entirely at his mercy, delay followed delay, and pretext pretext, till at length the mask has been thrown off, and there is no longer any mention of doing me justice."

"He would do it still," said Sir Frederick Beltingham; "for you must have observed, dear lady, that Alcester is not unkind or bad at heart; he would do it still, I say, if this other entanglement into which he is likely to fall could be prevented."

"What other entanglement?" cried the young lady, turning very pale; "I know not what you mean, sir."

"What!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, "has no rumour reached your ear? I thought such a secret would creep through a mouse-hole—and there must be plenty in this old place—to arrive at the person most interested in hearing it. Has no one mentioned to you the fair blue-eyed cottage-girl, his new passion?"

He knew that all his words were daggers to the unhappy lady's heart; but he did not scruple to use them.

Henrietta Compton sank down on one of the seats below the pictures, and pressed her handkerchief on her eyes, weeping bitterly.

"Be not so grieved," said Beltingham, "the mischief is not yet done, and may perchance be averted. From some words he let fall last night, I imagine he has met more resistance than he expected. He is a creature of impulse, as you well know; and when passion is strong upon him, he will promise anything, vow anything, do anything, to obtain his object. He boasted yesterday that she should be in this house to-day before sunset."

"In this house!" cried the lady, starting up, and gazing at him with her hands clasped. "In this house!"

"Ay, even so," answered Beltingham: "but as I have said, it may be averted, if you will help me."

It was an imprudent expression that he employed; for to any very clear and quick sight it would have shown that the person whom he wished to serve was himself, not her. But the lady was blinded by agitation and distress; and she remarked it not at the moment, though it recurred to her memory afterwards. "How, how?" she exclaimed eagerly.

"Easily enough," replied Beltingham. "Doubtless, to remove all scruples, he will in this instance, as before, pro-

mise marriage. Now if you can show her that he has already done so to you "——

"I have got his letter," cried Henrietta, "the letter in which he proposed my flight. He says,—I remember the words as well as if they were all written in fire upon my heart —'We will be married instantly, to satisfy all; but from the moment that you quit your mother's house, you are my wife, and I am your husband.' And he added, 'Will this not calm your fears, Henrietta?'—Oh, God! Oh, God! and he has forgotten all this!"

"Why, it is a contract!" exclaimed Beltingham; "the church would hold it as a valid marriage, being by the consent of both, and no lawful impediment. But show her this, dear lady; and, as she is a good and virtuous girl, she will see he is making promises he cannot keep. We must guard her, however, against violence," he continued, apparently with thoughtful consideration, although in reality he was touching upon the point most maturely weighed beforehand.

"But how am I to show her this letter?" asked Henrietta Compton; "how am I to warn her? Cannot you do so yourself?"

"No," answered Beltingham. "You would not, of course, trust such a valuable document from your hands; and I have no other proof. Besides, it would embroil me with Alcester; and a man of seven-and-twenty is not the fit person to meddle in such an affair. All I can do is, to provide for her safety; and even that I must not do in person, for fear of misconstructions. But I have an old and faithful servant with me, somewhat advanced in years; he could escort her safely to her friends in a distant part of the country, while I remained here."

"Surely he would never use any force to bring her hither!" exclaimed the lady.

"You are mistaken," answered Beltingham; "he boasted that she should be in this house before night; and if by any means within the wide range of possibility he can make his boast good, he will do it, let the result be what it may. There is but one way, lady, to avert all that is likely to happen: during the breakfast hour you must go down to the cottage where she lives."

"And where is that?" asked Henrietta.

"At this moment I know not," replied the knight; "but you shall be informed within an hour; I will send you word by your own woman, or write the description of the place on a small slip of paper. You will understand what it means. Then go down to the place named, and let her know the whole. If you find her bent on her own destruction, and

not to be warned, we cannot help it; but if, on the contrary, as I fully believe, you discover that she is terrified at her danger, and anxious to fly, let her know that at the little wooden gate of the park, she will meet an old and respectable man, who will give her the word 'Henrietta,' and conduct her to a place of security. I will remain here and occupy Alcester in the meanwhile. Methinks the scheme cannot fail."

"Let me think!" said Henrietta Compton, "let me think!" and she walked to one of the windows and gazed out. Her brain was troubled with many thoughts, and she pressed her hand upon her brow. Her heart was a battle-field for many emotions, and the struggle, for some time, was intense. At length she turned towards Sir Frederick Beltingham, and said, "No, sir, no!—I will not do this!—If I were his wife I would not,—much less as I am! I have done wrong to hear all this; for I have no title to spy into his actions. Hear me to the close! Nevertheless, I feel for a fellow-creature like myself. I would not have another woman know misery like mine. I will write to this girl, and give her warning. If she take it, well. If she be brought up hither against her will, I will take care that she is not long detained. There is yet some energy in my nature, though it has been sadly cowed; and I will exert it to save another, though it is too late to exert it for myself. But I will not live in Lord Alcester's house, to contrive schemes against his schemes."

As she spoke, a small bell was heard to ring, and Sir Frederick Beltingham demanded, in a hurried manner, and with an angry look,—“Is this your last determination, madam?”

“It is,” she answered.

“Very well, then,” he rejoined, with a bitter sneer, “you will soon be one of a harem! I wish you joy of your sultanaship!”

“The fiend!” said the lady to herself, as he turned on his heel and left her; “he has some dark plot under this; that is clear enough. God frustrate his wicked devices!” And, retiring to her own chamber, she sat down to write.

CHAPTER VII.

It is perfectly inconceivable the mass of corrupt scheming which was to be found in England during the reign of the second Charles. It was not alone in the court or the cabinet, or the courts of law, or the Houses of Parliament, but in every mansion and in almost every family in the land. The objects were all different, perhaps, but the means the same. Every one was plotting to gain some end—power, gold, sta-

tion, love, honour, fame—and all by tortuous paths, by cunning, trick, artifice, knavery, violence; but rarely violence where corruption would do. There was no shame; for, from the king to the linkboy, every one knew his neighbour to be a rogue, and there was no such thing as morals in the back parlour to shame the vice in the state drawing-room. The records of most private families of the period show that this was the case; but, of course, there were some exceptions. One or two honest statesmen are recorded, and such things as patriots were found, with a lantern; but most of them, it must be said, expiated their eccentricity on a scaffold. There were also some private individuals who thought straightforward truth was best, and some families in which sincerity was the rule.

From some of the most common scenes of the day, as exhibited at Malwood Hall and in its neighbourhood, I turn to another house of a character totally different, and not less so, indeed, in point of its inhabitants than of its architecture. The distance between the two places was about eighteen miles—easily travelled in imagination, reader, but less easily, in those days at least, over the high road. The country rose gradually from Malwood, and the road wound through hill and dale, through wood and pasture, till at length, in passing over a gentle ridge, a fine old castellated building, with some trees hiding the base of two of the towers, was seen standing out upon the hills at about two miles' distance. It had been built in the time of Edward the Fifth; but had been attacked and taken more than once during the wars of the Great Rebellion, and suffered considerably from cannon-shot, and an attempt to blow up one of the principal towers. As soon as the family of Stuart was once more seated on the throne of England, however, and the lassitude which succeeds great convulsions, had paralysed the war spirit in the land, the proprietor had devoted a considerable portion of the remains of his large estates to restore, improve, and modernise Ellerton Castle, and he had succeeded in rendering it one, not only of the most splendid, but of the most convenient mansions possessed by the country gentlemen of England.

Since then it had passed into other hands, and now, in what was then called the ladies' withdrawing-room, at an early hour of the day of which I have lately been speaking, were to be seen two persons, very different in character and in mind from those to which the description given above of English society at this period, would apply.

Seated at a table with several papers before her, from which she had been copying some passages, was a lady of perhaps three-and-twenty years of age. Her features were not altogether regular, but there was a charm in the expression, a

brightness, a frankness, a winning truthfulness of look, which was more than beautiful. Her form, too, was perfect, and though the complexion was brown, yet it was clear, and warmed with the hue of health. By her side, and looking over her shoulder, was one we have seen before, and therefore, I need not describe him further.

Francis Vipont, or Virepont, leaned one hand upon the table, and pointed to a part of the page before his sister, saying, "Do not write that, Emmeline. It is not true, and falsehood in verse is a corpse decked with flowers. Oh, what a thing is truth, my dear sister!"

"A jewel rarely found," answered the Lady Emmeline, "yet not valuable for that alone, Francis. I think, Francis, that in art as well as morals, truth is the great foundation of all excellence. We may add ornaments, but the ornaments must themselves be true, and the disposition of them according to the inherent truth of nature. It is all the same with the poem, the statue, the painting: they are the expression of truths. The fiction, the imagination is in the arrangement and in the selection. How any figure shocks the mind in poetry that has not truth as its basis; how any combination of colours that were never seen combined in nature offends the eye—but you are buried in thought, Francis, and while I am talking of art you are meditating graver things. Whither is your mind wandering?"

"From the subject far away," said Lord Francis, "but not from the spot, dear Emmeline. I was thinking, my sweet sister, how we ever came here; not by truth, Emmely, I fear. I feel it every moment I stay under this roof. It pains me, sweet sister,—it disturbs my rest."

The lady Emmeline shook her head, sadly, and said, "I cannot help thinking, Francis, that it disturbs the rest of another as well as of ourselves. Did you not remark a strange difference when you returned, after so long an absence?"

"I did, indeed," replied her brother; "but yet I cannot think that such feelings as we experience can be the cause, otherwise the remedy would be very easy,—to restore that which we wrongly possess."

"I fear that is not possible, Francis," answered his sister; "the same reason that my father gave for accepting the estates at first must still hold good. They would have been given to another, and even now, if we were to restore them, they could not be held by one attainted of high treason."

"Accepted!" said Lord Francis, with a sigh, and a mournful shake of the head; "that is a gentle word, Emmeline; but we must not talk of such things, dear sister, where a father is concerned; yet let me say, that were the wish to

make restitution—were the excuse valid, indeed—the rents of the estate might be received and transmitted to the just owner, until time, and the change of circumstances, and the subsidence of party virulence and popular error, might enable Sir William Ellerton to return in safety and prove his innocence of the false charges preferred against him. Now let us speak no more on this, Emmeline. I know what my own conduct would be. I know what it will be, if God gives me the power of doing right where gross wrong has been committed."

"I think, Francis, you do not know rightly all the circumstances," said his sister. "I know them, alas! too well;" and a very grave shade fell over her countenance. "You were absent in France, but I was here in England; heard all, and saw much. The apparent tools of the party were Oates and Bedlow, but there was another, who, for purposes of his own—I do not well know what—confirmed, by faint denials and suspicious attempts to excuse and apologise, the charges which two miserable ruffians brought against Sir William Ellerton,—I mean Sir Frederick Beltingham. When examined by the committee, he acknowledged, with affected hesitation, that he had heard our poor cousin use some strange discourse. He did not think that it was treasonable, he said; and he declared that Sir William had drunk too much wine when he so spoke. Now, you know, Francis, he rarely drank aught but water."

"And what could be the villain's motive?" inquired her brother.

"I strongly suspect," answered Emmeline, "that it somehow affected our sweet Gertrude; for in my own distress of mind, and not knowing how deeply Sir William Ellerton was involved, I hurried over to beseech him to assist poor Henry in his escape. It was but half an hour before they fled themselves, and Sir William was already gone; but Gertrude came down in haste to see me, and gave me the letter for you, which I sent immediately. Then it was I first learnt their own state, and I remember well she put her two fair hands upon my own, and said, 'I knew it would be so, Emmeline, when that dark, fiend-like man went away, muttering vengeance, because my father resented an insult offered to his child: I, who knew him better than the rest, was very sure that he would have that vengeance.' I shall never forget that dear girl's kindness in the midst of her own distress, and how she soothed me with assurances of Henry's safety, telling me that her father, at the risk of his own life, had already ensured Henry Maldon's escape, and that he whom I loved was, by that time, safe across the sea. She little knew, poor girl

how treacherous that sea can be; and I little dreamt it either."

Emmeline wept, and her brother soothed her gently. After a moment or two, however, he turned her mind back to the subject on which she had first begun to speak, saying, "Then you really think, Emmeline, that my father had no share in pointing suspicion towards Sir William Ellerton? I know that Lady Ellerton is fully convinced he had, and in fact that he was the prime mover in the whole. The friend of Shaftesbury, he knew all that passed; and he reaped a rich harvest too from his cousin's ruin. What was it to him to give fifty thousand pounds to the crown, and to receive such an estate as this? Oh, my dear sister, such things do not take place without some previous understanding."

"I trust, I hope that it was not so," answered the lady. "He declared loudly—I have heard him myself—that he did it to save the estate for his cousin; and I have reason to believe that he even interceded strongly for Sir William with the crown."

"God grant it!" said the young man, with evident doubt still resting on his mind; "God grant it, Emmeline! But I must away, dear sister; for I have business over at Malwood."

"Will you not stay for breakfast?" asked his sister.

"No; I will breakfast there," answered Lord Francis; but as he spoke, the door was opened, and a gentleman, habited in black, entered with a slow and stately step. He was a tall, thin man, far past the middle age. His countenance was dark, but handsome, although the expression was sinister and unpleasant. The deep-set eyes, quick and bright, were overhung by enormous bushes of grey eye-brows; and the firm compressed lips were only distinguished from the rest of the face by a very faint, fine line of red in a countenance almost colourless. The hand was meagre and bony,—the hand of age; but yet his step was firm and strong, though somewhat slow. In person he was well formed, holding himself still very much upright; and there was an air of dignity about him which would have been very impressive, if it had not been joined with a dark and gloomy look, as if there was a heart ill at ease below.

On entering the room, no smile came upon his lip to see his children; but, without the slightest movement of his head, his eye rolled from the one to the other, as if inquiring, 'What have you two been conversing upon?' Advancing slowly to a table, the Earl of Virepont had laid down some papers which he held in his hand, and though he returned his daughter's embrace when she advanced to wish him

good-morning, he took no notice of his son, till Lord Francis, as he was generally called, addressed him, expressing a hope that he had slept well.

"What makes you think I have slept ill?" asked the Earl, abruptly.

"You complained yesterday of want of rest, my lord," replied his son. "I should have said, I hoped you had slept better."

"I seldom sleep well, son," answered the Earl; "but why have you your hat in your hand?"

"I was about to ride over to Malwood, my lord," replied Lord Francis, "to breakfast there."

"You are now very rarely in your father's house," said the Earl, gloomily. "I fear, in the present instance, I must request your stay till after breakfast; for there is business to be spoken of, and I shall need your presence. I thought your cousin, my Lord of Alcester, had returned to London."

"No, my lord, he is still at Malwood," replied the young nobleman.

"Strange! he has not been here for more than a week," said his father. "Have you seen him since you returned from Spain?"

"No, I have not," answered the son; "but I was informed yesterday that he is still at Malwood."

The Earl made no reply, and Lord Francis gave his hat to a servant who entered, bringing in a small glass of some cordial for the Earl. It seemed to the young nobleman, in his impatience to depart, that breakfast was delayed far longer than usual; and so, perhaps, it was; but it was served at length, and after nearly three-quarters of an hour spent at the meal, and that well nigh in silence, the Earl rose, and was quitting the room, when his son reminded him that he had desired to speak of matters of business.

"Ay, true!" said the Earl; "come with me into my book-room;" and leading the way, he proceeded to his library; and there ceremoniously invited his son to be seated, after he had taken a chair. He himself then leaned his head on his hand, and meditated for a moment or two.

"I have been considering for some time," he said at length, "of a suitable match for your sister, sir. You are well aware that I had arranged she should marry Sir Henry Malden, then heir to his grandfather, the late Lord Alcester. This arrangement, however, was fortunately terminated by his death at sea. I say fortunately, not from any feelings of ill will towards the young gentleman himself, but because his might have proved exceedingly inconvenient, after he had thought fit to mingle in the horrible plot and conspiracy

detected four years ago; and in his case, as I explained to you in regard to your own unfortunate engagement, no member of a family over which hung such a charge should ever have entered into mine. Out of consideration for Emmeline's feelings,—though, as she was but eighteen at the time, they cannot have been very deeply affected—I have not pressed her to any new engagement. Four years have now passed, and the matter is, of course, forgotten."

"I think not, my lord," replied his son; "I feel sure that it is as strong upon Emmeline's mind as ever."

"Then it is time she should forget it," answered his father, sternly, "and the best means of obtaining that object is to unite her to another. In a word, sir, it is my determination to propose to your cousin, Lord Alcester, a still closer alliance between the two families, by which the plan originally proposed will be carried out; the two houses of Virepont and Maldon will be united, and the whole county from Wyncombe to Woodcester will be in the possession of one or the other."

"You hardly know, my lord, I think," said Francis Vipont, "the general character of the man to whom you propose to give my sister. I am sure that what you seek is her happiness in such an arrangement, but Alcester, I am sorry to say, is notorious for his libertine habits; the companion and friend of all the most licentious persons of a licentious court, and known himself as one of the most debauched amongst them."

"Errors of youth, errors of youth!" replied the Earl, waving his hand. "With a lady and a virtuous woman for his wife, all such evil practices will be cast aside, like the slough of a snake in the sunshine."

"And the reptile remain unchanged," muttered Francis to himself.

"All that you have to do," continued the Earl, "is to bear a message from me to your cousin, Lord Alcester, opening the negotiation for the alliance I speak of."

"You must excuse me, my lord," replied his son, in a firm but respectful tone. "You are Emmeline's father, and act as you think fit; but I am her brother, and love her too dearly to take any part whatsoever in bringing about a marriage which, in the first place, will be repugnant, I know, to all her feelings; and which, in the second place, would, I do believe, render her wretched, from the character of the person selected."

The Earl of Virepont suffered no anger to appear in countenance or manner. "You refuse, then," he said; "you refuse? Take care, young man!"

"I regret exceedingly to be obliged to decline," answered his son; "but, whatever be the consequences, I cannot do it."

"I have done, sir; you may retire," replied the Earl, gravely.

"I feel perfectly convinced, my lord," said Francis Vipont, in a tone of deprecation, "that you are not, you cannot be aware of all the circumstances. I will not speak of Emmeline's attachment to poor Henry Maldon, of its imperishable nature, of the regret for his loss which she still feels, and of the resolution which I know she entertains of never marrying. That might offend you, for you certainly have a right to rule your own family as you think fit. But from regard for my sister, I must make you aware of the circumstances. Not much more than a year ago Alcester carried off poor Henrietta Compton: the daughter of a lady of good family, though small fortune. There is no doubt that it was done upon the pretence of immediate marriage, and some people assert that there is even a contract between them. She is down here with him at Malwood, I find, even now; and yet it is notorious that he is pursuing his libertine amours in every different direction. Surely, my lord, this is not a man whom you would choose for my sister's husband, whom you would select to replace, in her affections, one of the bravest and noblest of human beings. In regard to this pretended plot, which there is hardly a man in England now believes to have been any plot at all, I take upon me to affirm that the charge both against Maldon and Sir William Ellerton was as false as it might be expected to be from the two perjured villains who made it, and the worse but more artful villain who supported it. Emmeline, depend upon it, will never suffer the belief that Henry had a share in any treason, to sap her affection for him, or to blot out his memory from her heart."

The young gentleman spoke warmly, but with every demonstration of respect; and his father listened to him in profound silence, with his eyes bent unmoved on the table. The only sign of emotion was the varying colour in his cheek, which once or twice flushed, and then resumed its pallid hue again. When Lord Francis had done, the Earl raised his eyes and slightly bowed his head, saying, coldly, "You may retire."

The young man took a few steps towards the door; but before he reached it, he was stopped by his father's voice, saying, "Stay yet one moment. You affect to disbelieve the existence of a Popish plot in these realms, and assert in a very bold tone the innocence of two men who were particularly dear to you: the one, a young gentleman who is dead and cannot be misled; the other, an elder and experienced man

who sought to take your father's life. Of that last fact, sir, there can be no doubt. It may be a claim to your gratitude and regard; and it is a claim to my everlasting remembrance of him. That, however, is no matter: you have long ago heard my opinions and my commands on all subjects connected with him, except in regard to the imprudence which you have displayed to-day. I have but called you back to warn you not to utter such rash opinions in public, or you may find your way to the Tower. Rest satisfied with bringing them forward to insult me here, and to affect my title to one-half of my property, but do not publish in the ears of men who might report it, that you believe the deliberate judgment of many courts of justice, the assertions of numerous parliamentary committees, and the sentences, after due examination of the house of peers, to be falsehood, fabrication, and injustice. It is not probable that such a gross offence would be passed over. Courts and parliaments know how to vindicate themselves; and I do not wish to see that done at the expense of my only son. Now, leave me, for I have business."

Francis Vipont turned away with a heavy heart, sad for his sister Emmeline, sad for himself, and even for his father; for that father, within the last four years, had become an altered man. Though never cheerful, he had been calm and equable in temper, and though not easily turned from his purposes, yet neither stern nor harsh. He had never been what is called frank, but he could bear frankness in others; and he piqued himself upon going straightforward to his object without following the tortuous paths of courts. There was a great change: and Francis felt that the cause for that change must be a sorrowful one.

CHAPTER VIII.

IMPATIENT at the delay which had taken place, with a flowing rein, and an easy seat, Lord Francis Vipont rode rapidly away towards Malwood Hall. Although his was a thoughtful—one might almost say imaginative—disposition, the eagerness with which he hurried on prevented reflection. But while he gallops on his way towards the foot of ~~the~~ ^{the} blue hills, which must surely retard his progress for a time, I may as well write a few words upon the characters already introduced, and the events which had preceded the opening of this tale. Every reader of English history is acquainted, more or less generally, with that dark and horrible period in the reign of Charles the Second, when, from the smallest possible beginning, and from a scheme of deceit and treachery

probably insignificant in the commencement, a sort of epidemic madness was communicated to at least two-thirds of the English people, driving them to acts of insane fury, almost without a parallel in history.

A stranger warned the king of England, whilst walking in the park, that some mysterious danger menaced him; an infamous and disgusting man, named Titus Oates, without character, means, or abilities, coarse in his manners, vulgar in his language, disgusting in person, and degraded in his mind, was found to declare that the apprehended danger lay in a plot of the Papists to destroy the monarch, overthrow the constitution, and restore the predominance of the Roman Catholic religion in England. The whole story was incredible; improbability was marked in every part of it, and impossibility was apparent in many. Nevertheless, whether the charge against the Papists originated with statesmen, or was simply the device of a needy swindler, some men of noble birth, and high in office, seized upon it as a happy means of promoting their own dark schemes. Oates found his first meagre sketch so successful, that he proceeded to enlarge and embellish it, till that which was absurd became monstrous. Nothing, however, is incredible to the credulity of party passion; and as long as the fever of the public mind could be kept up, the delirium of the multitude continued in full force. This was only to be done by the frequent administration of new stimulants, and day by day fresh accusations were brought forward, involving many of the noblest and best in the land in a pretended conspiracy, which had no existence except in the imagination of the perjured and sanguinary denouncer. It was easy to extend his accusations from one class to another; and consequently, when the field of the Papists was exhausted, a multitude of Protestants were assailed, either as persons who sought to smother the plot, as the beastly accuser called it, or as concealed Papists, who had obtained a dispensation from Rome for outwardly conforming to the Church of England. Amongst the former, were all who expressed a doubt of the truth of the witnesses, and the reality of the conspiracy; and the latter class comprised a number of persons of wealth and influence, whose property was an object of cupidity, or whose ruin was necessary to the gratification of political or private enmity.

No man's life or reputation was safe; and fear, that most infectious of diseases, came to finish what fury had begun. Men's terrors at the very chance of accusation induced them to assert that to be true which they knew to be false, and to aid the attempt to prove that which was palpably impossible. The madness seized on the House of Commons, and the most

frightful and outrageous acts of tyranny and injustice were perpetrated by a body of men elected to defend the liberties and uphold the rights of Englishmen. The terror seized upon the courts of law, and changed the sword of justice into the knife of the assassin. The judges dared not maintain the simplest rules of evidence. Scroggs, the chief justice, showed himself zealous in condemnation, and partial in the administration of the law. Truby, the recorder, aided in the work of death and confiscation; and the other judges did not venture to vindicate the purity of the sanctuary, under the apprehension of being included in an accusation which spared not the highest or most virtuous. Evident perjury was received as direct evidence, against which nothing but positive testimony could be of any avail; and a passionate and prejudiced jury required, not that the accuser should prove his charge to be true, but that the accused should prove his guilt to be impossible. The Queen herself was accused at the bar of the House of Commons; and, to use the words of a writer of that day, "Nothing ordinary or moderate was to be heard in people's communication; but every debate and action was high-flown and tumultuous. All freedom of speech was taken away; and not to believe the plot, was worse than being Turk, Jew, or infidel."

In the midst of these events, Sir Edmondbury Godfrey, the justice before whom Oates made his first deposition, was found murdered; and this circumstance—although it is probable that he destroyed himself—was received as full confirmation of the charges against Papists and their supporters. Oates himself, the infamous and the low, was lodged in Whitehall, and received a pension, enormous for those times; while imprisonment and death awaited all on whom his venom fell, who could be found, and confiscation, in many instances, followed those who fled for safety to another land.

Charles, the clear-sighted and the witty, though the unprincipled and the weak, saw the falsehood of the charges, the baseness of the accusers, and the criminality of the motives; yet let all things take their course, except in the case of the Queen, for whose protection he thought fit to exert his authority; perhaps the only conscientious act of his whole life; and the court continued in revelry and amusement, in the midst of scenes of blood and massacre; as frantic merriment and unbounded licentiousness are sometimes known to reign in the midst of the most deadly pestilence.

Such was the state of England about four years before the period at which I have thought fit to open this history; and at that time, three families of great distinction, some members of which I have already introduced to the reader, were living

in harmony and affection, already united by the bonds of kindred and friendship, and looking forward to still closer ties.

The family of Sir William Ellerton, then inhabiting Ellerton Castle during the greater part of the year, consisted of but three members, the father, the mother, and one daughter, heiress of large estates, which, notwithstanding her youth, for she was not then seventeen, caused the hand of Gertrude Ellerton to be sought by more than one noble house. Sir William Ellerton, himself, was a man no way ambitious. A minor during the agitated period of the civil war, he had escaped confiscation; and though, at the Restoration, a peerage was offered to him, when rewards were withheld by Government, as usual, from most of those who had really distinguished themselves in the royal cause, he respectfully declined the honour, and remained Sir William Ellerton still.

Much surprise was excited by Sir William treating very coldly the numerous proposals of alliance which were made to him when his daughter arrived at womanhood. But the baronet's reply was invariably that he would not control Gertrude's choice. He said, she was too young to marry yet, but she should make her own selection; and he only claimed the right of veto, though he added, not unwisely, that he would endeavour to render the exercise thereof unnecessary, by excluding from her society those to whom he should most strongly object. One father, of rank, wealth, and power, urged upon him somewhat too strongly the expedience of choosing a husband for his child upon the ordinary principles of the day, when station and riches were the two great considerations. But Sir William replied, with proud humility, that if Gertrude chose the parson of the parish she should have him; and that case was soon decided by the aspirant son being married to the daughter of the then Lord Mayor. Gertrude herself, ere long, decided all others; for the son of her father's second cousin, the Earl of Virepont, the play-fellow of her youth, was a constant guest at her father's house, and his sister Emmeline, though somewhat older than herself, the dearest friend she had, except her own mother.

There was no sudden burst of passion between herself and Francis Vipont; it was affection, which had grown with their growth and strengthened with their strength; and one day, when Sir William Ellerton entered the little sitting-room which Gertrude had made her own, he found her with her eyes full of pleasant tears, and her hand in Francis Vipont's. The young nobleman did not drop it, nor did he show the least embarrassment; but leading the blushing girl towards her father, he simply and frankly said, "Sir William, will you give me this dear hand?"

Sir William Ellerton offered no opposition ; but, according to a very common custom of fathers in all ages, from the time of the Patriarch Jacob to our own days, he required his young cousin to wait. He did not, indeed, extend the term of apprenticeship so long as Laban did to Israel, but he exacted what was perhaps a harder servitude than that of Jacob ; for he made the young lord promise to travel for two years ; and perhaps Gertrude Ellerton and Francis Vipont thought so long a separation a very painful condition. A month was spent in much happiness, however, before the young lord departed ; but almost from the hour he quitted the shores of England, sorrow and misfortune fell upon the house of her he loved.

A few words must be said before I proceed further, of the family into which Gertrude was to enter on her lover's return from foreign lands. The Earl of Virepont was, undoubtedly, an ambitious man. His own estates were but a fragment of the former vast possessions of his race, and there was a strong predominant desire, amounting almost to a passion in his breast, to restore the ancient splendour of his house. The union of his son to Gertrude Ellerton was, of course, in these circumstances, an object greatly to be desired ; and he not only gave his willing approval, but remonstrated somewhat warmly with her father on the proposed delay.

Sir William, however, was firm, urging the extreme youth of both parties, and the Earl was forced to acquiesce. His ambition seemed destined to be fully gratified in the marriage of both his children ; for shortly before his son's engagement to Gertrude, the grandson and heir of the old Lord Alcester sought the hand of his daughter Emmeline ; and, although the Earl saw some objections which might have been fatal to the lover's suit, had not a very considerable fortune been already in the young gentleman's possession, and great wealth and high rank in expectation. Henry Maldon was accepted as the future husband of Emmeline Vipont, and busy preparations were already in progress for this marriage, when the pretended discovery of the Papist plot cast all England into confusion. The objections of the Earl, the only drawback to the gratification which he felt at the alliance about to take place, were, indeed, serious ; for he himself, though conforming to the church of England, had a strong leaning to pure Calvinism, while Henry Maldon was known to be attached to the high church, and was looked upon by the Presbyterian party in the kingdom, almost as a Papist. Such, indeed, was not at all the truth, although the suspicion was not without some plausible grounds ; for his father—then the second son of the Earl of Alcester—had visited Spain shortly

after the romantic expedition of Prince Charles and Buckingham, and had wooed and won a Spanish lady of high rank and large fortune, with whom he had returned to England, and lived, till her death, in great happiness. It was well known to the old Lord Alcester himself, and to the whole family, that the lady had embraced the Protestant faith after she had resided three or four years in England; but the fact was concealed as far as possible, lest her relatives in Spain should make her conversion a pretext for seizing her property in that country, although it had been secured to herself and her children by all the means which the ingenuity of Spanish lawyers could devise. Still, however, the story was credited, that she had brought up her son in the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church; and although the Earl of Virepont was well aware that this charge was false, yet his dislike to the high church party was little less than that which he entertained towards the Papists. The wealth and prospects of his young cousin, however, who had by this time succeeded to the property of his father and his mother, and who, by the death of his uncle, and the age of his grandfather, was almost certain of becoming Lord Alcester ere many years had passed, were too much for religious scruples with an ambitious man, and his proposals to Emmeline were accepted without hesitation.

To Emmeline herself, if the truth must be told, he had long been very dear; for there was something in his bold, free, resolute character, peculiarly pleasing to her. To say that he was wild and rash, would be to give a very false impression of his conduct. It was, perhaps, eccentric, or at least appeared so in the eyes of Englishmen; for the warm blood of his mother prompted continually bold enterprises; and totally unconscious of fear, he hurried into any adventure for which a good motive could be shown, either with no thought of the consequences, or with full confidence that his own powers of mind and body would carry him through in triumph. Witty, gay, learned, brave, expert in every exercise, and yet breathing honour and high feeling in every word, it is not wonderful that he won the deepest and most enthusiastic attachment on the part of a being such as Emmeline Vipont. But her dreams, like those of her brother and Gertrude, were soon to be rudely dispelled.

Both families were in London; and the Earl of Virepont affected to be exceedingly busy in preparations for his daughter's marriage; but his frequent private communications with the notorious Shaftesbury, raised a suspicion in many persons that political intrigue occupied more of his thoughts than his domestic arrangements. The intimacy between that great and statesman and his relation did not escape the attention of

Sir William Ellerton, and was by no means pleasing to him; for Shaftesbury had always been inimical to Gertrude's father, and had even endeavoured to deprive him of a part of his estates, on account of some pretended rights of the crown. In the attempt he had been frustrated, but Shaftesbury did not easily forgive, and he lost no opportunity of marking his dislike. Emmeline, was very happy, however; and nearly a month had passed in the peaceful enjoyment of that bright treasure, hope, when the first disclosure was made of the pretended Popish plot. Henry Maldon laughed, and treated it as a wild chimera; and Sir William Ellerton regarded it merely as a political trick to carry Shaftesbury's measures easily through the Commons.

At this time Sir Frederick Beltingham was a frequent visitor at the house of Gertrude's father. Sir William Ellerton did not think it any longer necessary to exclude from his daughter's society all those persons whom he judged unfitted to become her husband. Her heart was given, her faith plighted, and, in these altered circumstances, his doors were thrown open to numerous members of the court, who previously had sought vainly for admission. Sir Frederick Beltingham, however, was not a man to be startled by difficulties, and Gertrude's exceeding beauty roused the strong passions which he so studiously concealed, while the prospect of the great wealth to which she was heiress, awakened another demon, not less powerful in his heart. He went boldly forward with captivating and insinuating manners, subtle eloquence, and total want of principle, endeavouring, whenever he had an opportunity, to corrupt her mind and change her moral and religious views, resolving in the end to dare some bold stroke which would render the breach of her engagements with Lord Francis Virepont, and her marriage with himself, expedient. Such a course was by no means without example in those days; and for about a fortnight Gertrude's utter innocence betrayed her ear to his discourse. She listened to his wit, amused; of his insinuations and half-veiled sneers at virtue and constancy she did not understand one word. Suddenly, however, a new light broke upon her; he spoke more plainly, and Gertrude would not suffer him to detain her attention a moment afterwards. He was mortified; and he resolved to succeed by any means. He watched his opportunity when Lady Ellerton was out, and when he believed Sir William to be absent in the country; and with servants and a carriage in waiting, he entered the house, the gates of which, as was very usual with great mansions at the time, stood open. Furnished with good information, he found his way by the back entrance to the room where Ger-

trude was sitting; and not more than two or three minutes had passed ere Sir William Ellerton, reading in a neighbouring chamber, heard his daughter's voice raised high, as if in anger. Entering in haste, he beheld Sir Frederick Beltingham, with a tight grasp on both her wrists.

Sir William was unarmed, but, brave as a lion, and still in his full vigour, Gertrude's father sprang on him who had insulted her, and spurned him from his house like an intrusive cur. The villain muttered threats of vengeance as he went; but the vengeance he sought was not that which Sir William Ellerton expected. The latter looked in vain for a cartel; and in two or three days afterwards, all thought of these events were banished from his own mind and his daughter's, by sympathy for Emmeline, and anxiety for Henry Maldon.

The dark and dreadful scenes which were to be enacted had already commenced in the capital. Blood had been, two or three times, shed upon the scaffold; the refusal of justice and fair dealing to every accused person had become apparent to all, and information was secretly conveyed to Henry Maldon that Oates had made a deposition against him. At first he was inclined to treat the charge with contempt; but it so happened that a son of his late father's steward was clerk to the justice before whom the deposition was made; and breaking in upon him while conversing with Emmeline, the young man showed him, not only that already five persons had suffered upon evidence not half so conclusive as that which could be brought against himself, but that the prisoners had been secretly subjected to the torture in prison. He informed him, moreover, that his house in the country had been searched, and that letters to his mother from the Papal Nuncio in Madrid had been found, exhorting her both to bring up her son in the strict Catholic faith, and use her utmost efforts for its re-establishment in England.

The danger was now but too evident. To stay, was to encounter death, and probably torture; and Henry Maldon consented to fly, in the hope that the madness of the people would soon pass away, and order and justice be re-established. For three days he lay concealed in the house of Sir William Ellerton, waiting for the means of flight; but at length a small vessel was found in the Thames, and the master, who could be depended upon, consented for a large sum to carry the fugitive over to the coast of Holland. Sir William Ellerton himself, in disguise, negotiated the whole; and the last time he saw the master of the vessel on the business, he inquired in a seemingly careless manner, if he would on the same terms receive a second passenger. The skipper, how-

ever, at once and peremptorily refused, saying that the only place of concealment on board was one in which he was accustomed to bring over prohibited goods of small bulk. In it one person could lie hid till the ship was out of the Thames, he said, but it would not hold two, and he would not risk taking another under any disguise.

Sir William Ellerton's question was not without an object; for he had learned by this time that his own name was upon the list of those accused, and that his arrest, which had been delayed by the confusion which pervaded all things in the capital, would take place on the following day. He hurried his friend down to the ship, however, during the night, saw him safely on board, and then at length told him that he would join him in a few days, if he retained life and liberty. Maldon pressed him to fly at once with him; but Sir William affected business at his own house before he could make the attempt; and Emmeline's lover would have remained in ignorance of his friend's kindness to the hour of his death, if the master of the vessel had not interfered to show him that it was impossible more than one could go. Sir William waited to hear no remonstrance, but returned in haste to his house, and his generous devotion nearly cost him his own life; for the officers sent to apprehend him were actually in his library, when he escaped by a door which led into Chancery Lane. He remained at a seaport in England for nearly a week before he could find an opportunity of passing the Channel; and there the sad news reached him, that the *Rose*, for so was called the vessel which had carried away poor Henry Maldon, had been wrecked between London and the Scheldt, and that every soul on board had perished.

His own escape was effected with the greatest difficulty; for by this time the feverish frenzy of the time affected the whole State, and warrants, officers, pursuivants, and serjeants were flying about the country in all directions. Every vessel which left the ports of England for France or Flanders, was searched before it was permitted to depart; and at length Sir William Ellerton was obliged to take a passage in a schooner bound for the Tagus. From Lisbon he made his way to Paris, where he was joined by his wife and daughter; but he soon found that the enmity of Shaftesbury, and, he had reason to believe, the cunning cupidity of a near relation, had found means, by a base perversion of law, to assail him in his property, now that his person was placed beyond their reach. His estates were, in the first instance, sequestrated; and after anxious consultations, it was determined that Lady Ellerton and Gertrude should return to London, and endeavour, by using the interest of friends and relations, to obtain that

justice which they could not hope for from a conscientious sense of right. But Lady Ellerton soon learnt that her husband's cousin, the Earl of Virepont, was labouring skilfully, and apparently with every prospect of success, to obtain a grant of the Ellerton property, in case of confiscation; and officious friends, who only served her by affording painful intelligence, took care she should hear that the Earl was pressing for extreme measures, and offering a high price—to be paid immediately to a needy court—for the possession of his kinsman's lands. She wrote instantly to her husband; and without delay, Sir William Ellerton hastened back to England, under an assumed name.

Then came a story which has never been made clear, and probably never will be; but it is certain that Sir William met the Earl alone in Ellerton Park, that swords were drawn and blood was shed, and that the baronet disappeared, while Lord Virepont remained slightly wounded, to see the confiscation of the estates completed, and the grant made out in his own favour.

The rest of the fate of all parties up to the period when this tale begins has been sufficiently shown already for the information of the reader; and I shall now return to follow Lord Francis Vipont up the slope of those hills, at the foot of which he has just arrived.

CHAPTER IX.

THE cloudy morning, gradually becoming bright and beautiful, has served as a figure of a thousand things. It has often consoled the baffled expectations of youth; it has often given hope to the wrung heart of parental disappointment. It is recorded that, happily turned by a criminal in a very simple little distich, it saved his neck from the halter, at a period of our legislative history when that same halter was almost as frequently found round a human as an equine neck. The circumstances, as they are told, are these:—A youth of the name of Lowry—which means in the north, cloudy—happened to take a fancy for some small article which was not his, and appropriated it in a manner which rendered his crime capital. He was one of the unfortunate, which, in the scape-grace interpretation of the word, means a man that is caught in his peccadilloes; and he was brought to trial. Not only was the offence proved, but it was also proved that the youth was very much given to various improper habits; in short, that he was a bad character. It seemed to be the opinion of the lawyers employed to prosecute, that his youth was rather an unfavourable feature in his case, and that, with one who had begun life so badly, the sooner he was out of the world the

better. The judge summed up in the same sense, but just when the jury were about to deliberate, the culprit turned the lawyers' point of aggravation into a defence, and exclaimed,—

“Although my name be Lowry, O, cast me not away!
For many a low'ry morning turns out a fine day.”

The jury resolved to give him a chance of such being the result in his own case, and with the liberal construction of their oath, which we see every day in cases of duelling, acquitted the prisoner.

Although the illustration is, as I have said, somewhat hackneyed, nevertheless I apply it to the feelings of Francis Vipont as he rode along. At first, the scene he had lately gone through with his father, and the struggle which he knew must soon take place between Emmeline's sense of duty and her feelings, rendered him very gloomy. His sky was overclouded; the heavens seemed to frown upon him; and the whole prospect looked grey and sad; but he thought of Gertrude Ellerton, and the belief that he should soon see her again, made the golden line upon the horizon's edge, whence very soon sprang a flood of beams, dissipating the mists and vapours, and leaving the sky of the heart all bright and sunshiny. He loved, reader, as the young heart loves,—with the intensity which blends all objects with its passion, penetrating them with the divine essence, and giving a soul-like vitality to things of clay. And the dream of the coming meeting was very bright. He remembered a thousand things which he would have wished to say, and had forgotten when last they met,—a thousand questions he should have asked. He thought he would ask them now, and fancy pictured Gertrude's looks as she answered; the star-like eyes beaming upon him, the warm lips of the small mouth trembling with the music of her own voice, the pearly teeth seen within their coral casket as she spoke, the nymph-like bosom heaving with the breath of love; and then the dear, pure, high spirit, springing to meet his, in the full outpouring confidence of single-hearted affection. Oh, it was indeed a sweet vision! and it carried him up lightly to the top of the hills.

Over the ridge there was a little valley filled with corn-fields, and a wood of some ten or twelve acres in extent, with a lone house often used by travellers as a place of refreshment, where they gave their tired horses a mouthful of hay and water, and cooled the journey-parched mouth with a draught of as good ale as any in the country. As soon as the wood and the house were in sight, Francis Vipont fixed his eyes upon it keenly, and for a moment or two seemed somewhat anxious; but when he turned the angle of the

copse, and saw several horses fastened to the hooks which adorned the face of the house, he appeared better satisfied; a smile came upon his face, and he said aloud, "Ah! I thought Dick would not fail me."

With the advantage of the ground he had quickened his pace, and in another minute he was before the door. A look of doubt came over his face; for, of the seven horses which were there assembled, four were not only very fine ones, for all were good, but their sleek coats and pampered air—even without the appearance of servants in the household dress of some noble family, of whom two were seen close by—would have proved them to be well fed and little-laboured citizens. The other horses were strong handsome beasts enough, but with more bone than blood, and with a look not of bad treatment or rough usage, but of plentiful exercise and hardy exposure.

The young nobleman, however, dismounted, and casting the bridle over a hook, went into the house from which no one had as yet come forth to receive him. On entering a little parlour to the right, he saw two men sound asleep upon the benches, with a large jug of ale standing hard by. Waking one of the sleepers with some difficulty, Lord Francis demanded in a low tone, "Where is Dick Myrtle?"

"Devil carry me if I know, my lord!" cried the man looking round; "he was here a minute ago; I'll go and fetch him."

"No, no," replied Lord Francis; "stay here and wake your companion. I will seek for Dick myself."

Thus saying, he left the room, and entered another opposite. It contained two persons, one of whom, the object of his search, was looking out of the window which commanded a view of the continuation of the road by which the young nobleman had come thither, while the other was walking up and down the room with a slow step and a thoughtful air. The latter was a man considerably past the prime of life, with an enormous flowing wig under the laced hat which he had not thought fit to remove; but his step was firm, and his appearance by no means indicated any diminution of corporeal powers. He seemed waiting till his horses had obtained some refreshment, and with that peculiar sort of self-involved business air, which is found more or less in every Englishman, and is always set down by strangers to the score of pride,—he was pursuing his walk and his meditations, without taking the slightest notice of the other tenant of the same chamber.

Nevertheless, the man who was standing near the window was worthy of some attention to those who have eyes for the

perfection of the human form. At first sight, he did not appear either very tall or remarkably powerful, for the proportions were so good, and the disposition of the limbs so just, that his strength lay concealed in his symmetry. When one stood by him, however, it was found that he could not be less in height than six feet and an inch; and on closer examination, the depth and width of the chest, with the thin flank and long but rounded thighs and legs, and the swelling muscles of the shoulders and arms became apparent. He was dressed in a mixed costume, blending that of the small farmer with that of the sportsman, though the strictness with which game was preserved under the old manorial system of England, in most instances, prevented the middle classes from indulging in the tastes of Esau. Nevertheless, in some cases, especially during the civil wars, the rights of the lord of the manor had been neglected or altogether lost, and the possessor of the soil, as is most just, had become by custom the proprietor of the game it nourished. The gun also, both in England and in France, had generally superseded the use of the crossbow, though the latter was still used in many places for killing deer; and lead cut into small pieces, if not actually what we call small shot (of which I have some doubt), was employed to bring down the bird upon the wing. Over a tight-fitting coat of a greenish-brown colour, Dick Myrtle carried a sort of baldrick or cross-belt, to which was suspended a powder horn and an anomalous sort of pouch; and as he called himself gentleman also, he had added to these accoutrements a sword well proportioned to the hand for which it was intended. He had on a pair of loose leather breeches and large riding boots, and his hat, unlike those in fashion at the time, had still a tendency to the steeple shape so much esteemed by the Puritans, who could love steeples nowhere but upon their own heads. It is probable, indeed, that Dick's affection for this exploded mode was more regulated by the convenience which that particular form of hat afforded for the arrangement of the various artificial flies and fishing lines which were generally fixed upon and twisted round his beaver, than by any fondness for the Puritans, or attachment to the costume of his ancestors; but, nevertheless, so it was, that, though a steeple-crowned hat was by this time difficult to procure, the hatter of the neighbouring town took care to have one down from London once a year for the service of Mr. Myrtle. No more frequent renewal ever took place in the head gear of Dick Myrtle; for though, to say truth, numerous falls, knocks, and ill treatment of various kinds seriously affected the beloved form before the twelve-

month was out, he continued to wear the friend of last year with fond affection till the month of March returned, and it became expedient to make a completely new arrangement of the flies and fishing lincs; for even when the season of angling was over, he could not make up his mind to remove the beloved implements.

Such was the person, and so adorned, towards whom Lord Francis Vipont advanced at once, after having given a marking glance towards the other occupant of the same chamber. Dick Myrtle, however, did not hear his foot till the young lord's hand was laid upon his shoulder, and then he turned quickly round, but without any exclamation, looking with a peculiar expression at the elderly gentleman who was perambulating the room, as a hint to Lord Francis that they were not without witnesses.

"I have been waiting these two hours," he said, without adding any title or name to his address; "and I was just then calculating whether I should ride off or remain."

"I have been unfortunately detained, Dick," answered Lord Francis; "but come out and we will speak further."

"One moment, young gentleman," said the elderly cavalier aloud, as they were quitting the room; "may I request to know your name?"

Lord Francis turned towards him in some surprise, "These are not times, sir," he replied, "when one furnishes every stranger with such information; and though, from your appearance, I doubt not I should be giving my name to the ears of a man of quality and distinction, yet I must decline to do so, unless I am apprised of the motives of your curiosity."

"What you have said is enough, sir," rejoined the old gentleman; "you have given me the information I require without knowing it. If you had been the person I want, or rather who wants me, you would not have asked my motive. I beg your pardon for detaining you. Good-morning."

The young nobleman bowed his head and withdrew, followed by Dick Myrtle, and the first question the former addressed to the latter was, "Do you know, Dick, who is that whom we have just left?"

"Not I," replied Dick; "he came in some five minutes ago, glanced at me very sharply, then shook his head as if he did not half like my looks, then got a little closer to me, just as a trout does to a fly not quite in season, then shook his head again, and began to strut about like a hen partridge before her covey, when she knows a fowler is not far off. He is here with a purpose, be sure, my lord; but be cautious, be

cautious in all things ; that is the right policy, whether we be angling for a shy fish or dealing with a strange man, always do the work delicately."

"I know you are discretion itself, Dick," answered the young nobleman ; "and that is the reason why I have desired to see you rather than any other man within fifty miles. As to this gentleman, he is evidently a man of high rank, and he is very soon satisfied, as you see. He excites my curiosity a little, but I have nothing to fear from him."

"I cannot tell that," said Dick Myrtle, "but whichever way you are going to lead when you go hence, I would advise you to dodge him a little. Take just the contrary road and cut round, for be sure he will watch you."

"I think not," replied Lord Francis ; "but at all events, we have not time for such manoeuvres, for I am later than I intended or wished. You were out last night as I passed back ; and I must tell you what I want as we go ; for I know I can count upon you, Dick, at a moment of need, and to say truth, such a moment is here now. Who are the men you have got with you ? I know their faces, but do not recollect their names or characters."

"Trustworthy fellows," answered Dick Myrtle. "One is, Spilman, the miller's son, as good a hand at quarter-staff as Little John. The other, they call dull Johnny Green, because he never says a word that he can help ; but he is less dull than they think, and all the better for not talking."

"Assuredly," said Lord Francis ; "but let them mount and come a little behind us ; I will ride on with you."

The men were soon in the saddle ; and the young nobleman and his companion, trotting on before, were soon in full conversation about the plans which Francis Vipont had formed. He found it somewhat difficult, it is true, to explain his object without betraying Gertrude's secret, and brought some imputations upon himself which he did not covet.

"Ha, ha ! my good lord," cried Dick Myrtle, after the young nobleman had informed him that he wished him and his companions to keep watch, two and two by turns, over a cottage girl, and give her protection at any time when she might need it ; "this is something new, to hear of your taking care of cottage girls. If it had been Sir Harry Farleigh or Lord Escrick, or the young Lord Alcester, I could have understood the matter, for they fly at all game from the heron to the sparrow ; but for you, my noble lord, this is a new tale."

"By no means, Dick," replied the young nobleman ; "it is, on my honour, of a piece with all the rest of my life. You

know me well, my good fellow; have known me from boyhood; and I do not think you will doubt me, when I say that my interest in this young person is as pure and honest as any that ever man felt for woman. I will not deny indeed, that there is something which I must conceal even from you, as to the motives which induce me to take such part in all that concerns her. One day, however, I will tell you all, and if you do not then find that I am acting towards her with honour, and only as I am bound to do, you shall call me villain without my venturing to resent it."

"I am glad of it, Lord Francis," said his companion; "for I should not like to refuse you anything; and yet I am too much of the yeoman, or rather too little of the gentleman, to like to see high lords and nobles using the lower classes of their countrymen only as objects of sport or pleasure. Your lord of the present day looks upon the poor country girl but as a baser kind of game,—a lapwing to be aimed at when woodcocks are out of season; and I would not, even for you, my lord, take part in such foul sport."

"My object, Dick, is to guard her from such attempts," replied the nobleman; "not to make them myself. She is as pure and good as the noblest dame in all the land: and, from motives of my own, but just and righteous ones, I will punish the man who injures or offends her, as if he insulted my own sister. But I would shield her from the aim of bad men, and it is, therefore, that I ask your aid; for I must be seen in the matter as little as possible myself; and I think that I do not reckon upon you amiss when I ask you, for three days, till I can arrange other plans, to watch over her as you would over your own child."

"Well, well! under those circumstances, I am quite willing," answered Dick Myrtle. "I can trust to your word, I know, Lord Francis; and you can trust to my wit where contrivance is required; for I have had a long apprenticeship in watching and circumventing one beast or another; and, after all, a man is but a two-legged sort of beast, not quite as shrewd as a fox, nor quite so persevering as a weasel; and whoever it is you are afraid of for the poor girl, I think I and those two fellows behind us will contrive to match him, if he have not the devil himself to help. But now you must tell me all that is needful; for without a good deal more knowledge, I shall make some blunder."

It was not without some consideration that his companion replied; for the explanations were not easy to give. When he did begin, however, he met with great assistance from Dick Myrtle's rapid powers of comprehension, and no less rapid capability of scheming. As soon as the latter heard

where the cottage was situated, and who was the person whose pursuit was apprehended, he exclaimed,—

"Oh, we will soon manage that young haggard! He's a bold bird, but unreclaimed. Let me see: that cottage, and the patch of wood behind, and the bit of stream in front, all belong to Ellerton, though they are touching the Malwood grounds. I know it well; for in Sir Harry's time, poor man! there was a notion of swapping that patch for some of the Malwood land on this side, so as to leave the old lord's ground in a ring, and I was asked to judge the value. Well, I have as much right there as any of the people from the house; and if you will but give me a word or two of authority, as I will tell you, under your hand, I shall have a better right still. I will so fish the stream and watch the game for you, that there shall be an eye upon the cottage from morning light till sun-down, and from evening close till dawn."

"That will do willingly enough," replied Lord Francis; "and I can do it, too, with full power; for my father has made over to me all rights of park and chase, forestry and stream, with whatever thereunto belongs."

"Then we will keep all poachers off the manor!" cried Dick Myrtle; "but we had better make straight for Wincombe, and there draw up the thing rightly. We shall hardly get ink and paper nearer."

"Oh yes," replied Lord Francis; "at the little inn by Newtown, we shall find all we want. The landlord is a clerk; and Wincombe is too far wide."

"True, true!" said Dick; "I forgot wise Master Barnacle, mine host of the Goose in Spectacles. We should find parchment there, I warrant, were it wanted; but good paper will do. We will send on the two fellows, before, to wait for us near the bridge, and I will whisper a word in the ear of dull Johnny, which will be worth a dozen in that of a brighter man."

After about a quarter of an hour's hard riding, they reached the entrance of the little village of Newtown, and its small country inn, on the front of which was painted by a rude hand, the grotesque image of a goose with a large pair of spectacles on its bill, while underneath appeared a very long inscription, purporting that all sorts of accommodation for man and beast were there afforded by Joseph Barnacle. The two men, who had hitherto followed were now sent on; and Lord Francis and Dick Myrtle, not anxious to court observation, gave their horses to the stable-boy, and hurried in to the hospitable door, on seeing a party of several people coming up the road at a rapid rate. Their demand for writing materials, then not usually to be found in small houses of

entertainment, was proudly complied with by Master Barnacle; and having received an injunction not to let any one into the room where his two guests were seated, he left them to attend to another company which had just come up.

"Look here, my lord, look here!" cried Dick Myrtle, as Lord Francis sat rapidly writing a warrant for his companion to sport upon such of the lands of the Ellerton estate as lay on the other side of the Malwood property, and to warn off, or seize and bring to justice, all persons found trespassing upon the same; "here are half a dozen black fellows on horseback; and they are bringing out of the yard a car like a cockle-shell, all gilt and bedizened. On my life, I never saw such a curious set of devils; and they have got something amongst them, wrapped up in a white sheet, just like my poor old mother, when she ran out, the night the house was burned down."

"Some of the jugglers for the fair, I suppose," said the young nobleman; "you had better come from the windows, Dick, or we shall have them importuning us to see their tricks."

"They are the smartest jugglers I ever saw," answered Dick Myrtle; "why, the blacks have got rings upon their arms just like solid gold."

"Tinsel, tinsel," said Lord Francis, writing.

"Well, there is no fear of their coming in upon us," rejoined his companion; "for they are off like a wild pigeon just started. I dare say the constables are after them for rogues and vagabonds."

"Not unlikely," replied the young nobleman, finishing the paper; "but there are your full powers, Dick; and now let us on as fast as we can go, though I suppose we must make Master Barnacle draw a cork, if but for the honour of the house."

Their horses were soon brought round and mounted, and the distance between the little inn and the cottage where Francis Vipont had left Gertrude on the preceding evening, was passed in about three quarters of an hour. That part of the journey was nearly without incident; for although the two horsemen at the turn of the road from Wincombe to Malwood perceived two servants standing talking together, who eyed the passers-by attentively, no offer was made to impede their progress; and they soon after saw their own comrades, dismounted from their horses, and standing near the little wooden bridge. By Lord Francis's directions, Dick Myrtle and young Spilman, the miller's son, went up into the wood, while dull Johnny Green, as he was called, remained by the stream, and the young nobleman alone approached the cottage.

He lifted the latch at once, and went in; but there was no one in the outer room: the inner was also vacant, and the lover's heart sank. Where could Gertrude be? There was one more chamber to be examined; but before he mounted the stairs, he called from below, and receiving no answer, went up.

The small but neat room above was untenanted; and, descending again, the young nobleman looked round, with anxious apprehension, for some indication of the fate of her he loved. The first thing his eyes fell upon was a large bundle of straw, tied curiously, in such a way as to resemble, in some degree, the human figure; but he stopped not to examine it, for on a little sort of fixed table, very common in cottages, which ran along the further side of the room under the shelves, he perceived two folded papers. One was sealed, the other not; but both were without address; and hoping that they might afford some information, he opened the unsealed billet, and read the few words it contained.

"I am forced to fly, dear Francis," so the writing ran; "there was danger at hand, and I dared not wait even to see you. You shall hear of me soon, whenever I am in safety."

Lord Francis Vipont asked himself, what was the danger from which Gertrude had fled? and his thoughts instantly turned to Lord Alcester. There was a burning, angry feeling at his heart, and his hand, without his knowing it, grasped the hilt of his sword. A moment's reflection, however, showed him that to seek revenge would be worse than vain; and he opened the other letter in the hope of finding further intelligence.

This was a much longer epistle, and written in a different hand. The words it contained were as follows:—"Whoever you are—which I know not—I write with those feelings which a woman never loses towards her own sex, to warn you against a man who would deceive you, as he has deceived me. I trust, and will believe, that you are virtuous as yet, and I hope, happy as innocent. I wish that you may preserve that happiness, but be assured you cannot do so if you listen to the seductions of a man who promises much, to perform nothing. He may vow that he will marry you: believe him not, for he made the same vow to me. He may give you that promise in writing, and swear by everything which should be sacred, that he will wed you immediately, if you will quit the protection of your friends: he may declare, with every semblance of truth, that he will love you till the last hour of his life. He did all this to me. I have his letter before me now,—an actual contract, I am assured,—his vows, his asseverations, are still in my ears. He has fulfilled no promise;

he has destroyed my peace, blighted my fame, wrung my heart, and now neglects me. So will it be with you. Do not delude yourself: the moment you yield, the only hold you have upon his affection is gone. I write, believing you are virtuous and good, and I bid you, for your own happiness, fly him as you would the pestilence, if you have the means of flight. If you have not, and still resisting are brought up here by force, you will find one who will aid, support, and deliver you, in

“HENRIETTA COMPTON.”

The young nobleman gazed at the letter for a moment or two, murmuring, “Poor thing!” but the next instant his thoughts turned to Gertrude again, and many a painful question suggested itself to his mind: whither had she gone? had she been able to effect her escape in safety? how could she, alone, aided only by an old and feeble woman, fly to any distance without danger, fatigue, and every sort of inconvenience?

He looked at the first note again. It was certainly Gertrude's handwriting; but, still, love is ever apprehensive for the object of affection, and the heart which fears least for itself, is often the most timid for those it loves. He asked himself, if, even in the attempt to fly, she might not have fallen into the hands of Lord Alcester, and his spirit took fire at the thought of Gertrude, his Gertrude, being subjected to insult by his cousin and his cousin's loose associates. He resolved to satisfy himself that she was at least safe from that distress ere he left Malwood; and quitting the cottage, he rejoined his companions of the way, to consult with Dick Myrtle as to what it was best to do in the existing circumstances.

CHAPTER X.

To the man of impulse, what a valuable thing is five minutes of calm consideration! What crimes would they often spare him, if they could be always obtained! what follies would it prevent him from committing! I must now return to Lord Alcester. Not above two minutes were allowed him after he quitted the cottage, on the morning of which I have just been speaking, before he had an opportunity of acting under the movement of passion. About five hundred paces from the door, he met his chief groom of the chambers, sauntering out to cure a headache, diligently prepared the night before. The man stopped and uncovered his head; and his lord, calling him, directed him at once to send down parties of men upon each of the three roads which led to the cottage.

Lord Alcester, at the time, thought he showed some delicacy in ordering that they should be kept out of sight of the windows as far as might be; but as he walked on towards his own mansion, entered the park, and strolled slowly along under the fine old trees, the calm shadow, the tranquil aspect of the woods and lawns, the peaceful solitude, seemed to fall softening upon his spirit. He fell into a fit of thought: he asked himself, if he were acting well and wisely. Where would this end? he inquired: to what might it not lead? He doubted himself—he knew that passion, with opportunity before him, might hurry him on to acts, of which he felt the shame beforehand. To seduce, to delude, to vow, and to forswear, might, according to man's code of honour, at least, in those days, be a very venial sin against a cottage girl; but to use intimidation—violence perhaps, was greatly different. Was it the act of a gentleman, of a man, or a mere brute? He hesitated in his purpose: he half regretted what he had already done. Had he left himself a means of escape without encountering a scoff, had there been any one to support, to invigorate him, the question "Shall I go on?" would have been soon answered. But false shame, the most powerful engine of the devil upon weak minds, was still against him; and, at the same time, passion, strong, fiery, pampered by indulgence, made his spirit revolt at the thought of yielding a prize of beauty and grace such as he had never beheld before.

With these wavering thoughts and resolutions, changing like autumn clouds, he reached the gate of Malwood House, and went in. He did not enter at once the eating-room, as it was then appropriately termed; but walked up the broad stairs towards his own apartments. In the gallery, however, he saw a figure coming towards him, the sight of which would at one time have made his heart beat with joy. Even now, as Henrietta Compton approached, passing from window to window, now in light, now in shadow, with an easy gliding motion, the knee just bent, and the foot retired only sufficient to carry her quietly forward, he thought her very pretty and very graceful; and the contrast between her gentle tenderness and the undisguised dislike which he had seen on the fair face of Gertrude, revived in a degree the old feelings of affection in his heart. Could he not be happy, he asked himself, in the love of that fair and affectionate being? He held out his hand to her as she came near, and asked in a tone of more kindness than he had often used of late, "Well, Henrietta, how are you this morning, love?"

But as the lady approached and gave her hand, he saw that her face was very grave. There were no tears in her eyes,

but there were traces of them; and the feelings of Lord Alcester were changed in a moment.

When a man says that he hates "a scene," it means, simply, that his selfishness is intense, timid, and irritable; and the noble lord was one of those who liked, as little as any man, remonstrances or reproaches, loud or tacit, however well they might be deserved. They were an offence to him, and on this occasion of all others, when he perceived they were coming, he was inclined to make his escape as fast as possible. Poor Henrietta Compton had learned this by sad experience, and she knew that the condition of her retaining any hold of him at all, of obtaining his society, and not incurring his anger, was to be silent in regard to her own wrongs, and seem to feel them as little as possible. At present, however, a higher purpose moved her; and she retained his hand in hers, saying, "Alcester, I wish to speak to you."

"Well, what is it?" he demanded, sharply. "I am in haste, and cannot attend to long stories now."

"Mine shall be a very short one," she answered. "I find you are engaged in a new pursuit, Alcester; that there is another butterfly whom you are now chasing; another innocent and happy girl whom you would make guilty and wretched like myself. Of my own love, of my own weakness, and my own wrongs, I am not now going to speak. I will utter not one reproach, so do not turn away: but oh, Alcester, for your own sake, forbear. Load not your conscience with so many crimes; bring not so much shame upon your own name. If not for her sake who has loved you more than life, still for your own sake, for your own honour; for your own credit, for your own future peace, forbear. There are at the court, in the city, in the country, hundreds, I might say thousands, too ready, too willing, to be the objects of your passion, brief, momentary, as I know it will be. They will have no remorse, no anguish of heart from reproach of conscience, or from blighted affection. Seek therefore pleasure, and you shall never hear a reproach from my lips. You shall see no jealousy; you shall never know the pangs which, perhaps, I may feel. But spare innocence; let it not be your evil fame, that nothing pure could be near you without becoming corrupted."

"Pshaw!" cried Lord Alcester, withdrawing his hand forcibly; "this is all cant and trash. You are misinformed, Henrietta, and have read me a sermon on a wrong text. Upon my life! you will wear out my patience if you go on in this way: nothing but sullenness and tears from morning till night—humour fit to tire out the love of any man—taking your meals in your own rooms, refusing all society, as if you wished

to make all the world believe that I kept you like a prisoner in a dungeon, or a bird in a cage."

"Grave charges, indeed, Alcester!" replied Henrietta Compton, "but are they just, my lord? When have I wept in your presence? when have I showed sullenness or disobedience to your commands?"

"If not in my presence," answered Lord Alcester, in a tone of affected gaiety, "you take care I shall know you weep in my absence, and those bright eyes, Henrietta, do not look the better for tears."

"I may weep my own faults, if I may not weep yours," replied the lady; "and as to the rest, Alcester, you cannot, I should think, either expect or wish me to come down and show myself as your concubine amongst your loose companions—But I have done. I have warned you, I have besought you, not for my sake, but for your own: I know what it is to feel that one has been deceived, I know what it is to be conscious of guilt, I know what the pangs are which a woman, betrayed and fallen, must ever feel; and I am sure that the man who produces them must be guilty in the sight of God for the havoc he has made in a happy heart. I am sure that, sooner or later, if he persists in the same course, punishment will overtake him from on high, and shame will follow him even amongst men—but I have done;" and she turned towards her own chamber.

"High time," said Lord Alcester, with an angry look; "on my life! this must be brought to an end;" and striding on, he entered his dressing-room, and cast himself down in a seat.

During nearly a quarter of an hour, the young nobleman remained in thought; and it would be difficult to follow all the confused and intricate lines which his mind pursued. A few words broke from his lips, however, which showed that in his meditations, the appeal which Henrietta had just made to him connected itself with some of the events of the night before.

"I do believe she loves me," he said; and then, again, he remained in thought for several minutes. "Pshaw, it was a mere juggle," he continued, "the fellow must have had hints from the servants. He followed them wonderfully well, however, and he had no time for much preparation. It is very strange. Yet it must have been a juggle; and Eserick, perhaps, was right. He should have been punished for playing off such tricks. I must go, however, and quiet Henrietta, or she will cry all day; but a kiss will put all that to rights. I wish she would be as gay as she used to be. There was some pleasure in her society then;" and proceeding to the

poor girl's room, he threw his arms around her, kissed her tenderly, told her that somebody had deceived her regarding his pursuits, and that she made herself unhappy for nothing.

Hurrying thence, Lord Alcester descended to the large hall where we first found him. The table was laid with two covers, and all the preparations for the substantial meal which was called breakfast in those days were complete. In the oriel window, with his feet stretched out and crossed, his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes bent with a listless expression on the distant prospect, sat Sir Frederick Beltingham. The whole attitude was studied in its apparent negligence, but so well had he disciplined art to represent nature, that few eyes could have discovered that the seeming indifference was assumed.

When Lord Alcester entered, he turned his head languidly towards him, saying, "On my life, Alcester, you must be possessed by a perturbed spirit to wander out so early in a morning. I watched you sauntering back from the park looking miserably Corydonish. I expected every moment to see you sit down under a tree and play upon a pipe. Is it love, my noble friend, that moves you thus early and late, like a hare in March or a cat at midsummer?—But tell me all about it, while we feed; for I am famished; and hunger is the only appetite which has any rule over me."

"Well, come then," said Lord Alcester, sitting down to the table; "I am hungry too."

"Then it cannot be love," said Beltingham, moving forward, and taking his seat; "for I have heard that those two prime passions of human nature, love and hunger, cannot exist together in the same stomach."

"I do not know," replied the peer abruptly, and pursued his breakfast.

When the meal was at its conclusion, and the servants had withdrawn, Beltingham returned to the subject of his friend's early walk, saying, "In good truth, Alcester, I envy you, to be moved out of your bed in the morning by any passion, feeling, or desire, but pure weariness of rest. Well, what says the blue-eyed girl of the cottage? for doubtless she is the object of your matutinal sighs."

"Why, she says nothing that is very pleasant," replied Lord Alcester, somewhat gloomily, but yet with an affectation of carelessness; "the truth is, Beltingham, she has got her head filled full of puritanical conceits of virtue and religion, et cetera. She is so bastioned in with bibles, and flanked in with psalm-books, that the little fortress will take a long siege to reduce it, I fear."

"Then take it by storm," said Sir Frederick, briefly; "that is the best plan."

"I do not know," replied his host. "I hate trouble in such pursuits; and am half inclined to hate any one who gives me that trouble. *Bis dat qui cito dat*; and I have a great mind to give it all up."

Beltingham mused for a moment, calculating what would best suit his own views. For an instant he thought of encouraging this despondency; but he knew human nature too well not to be aware that the very thought of another succeeding when he failed, would instantly raise up a spirit of watchful rivalry in Lord Alcester which would be a great impediment; and he rejected the idea as soon as formed, trusting that if Gertrude were once in the same house with himself, he should have no great difficulty in removing her from it, and getting her entirely into his own power; especially as any plausible offer of escape would undoubtedly be eagerly seized by her. After a silent pause then for about a minute, he said, with a smile, "How Escrik and Farleigh will laugh when they find she has foiled you!"

"They had better not laugh too loud," answered Lord Alcester, sharply.

"What, you would cut their throats?" replied Beltingham. "Depend upon it, Alcester, that they will have plenty of seconds in the laughter, if not in the duels. No, no; any heat would but make the ridicule worse. No, if I were you, I would not let them have occasion. You vowed that she would be in this house to-day, and that she should stay here four-and-twenty hours. I would make her do that, at least, and bring her bibles with her."

"I think I shall, to punish her for her impertinence," said the peer; "indeed, I told her so; but I left her five or six hours to think over it, and consider whether she would come willingly."

Sir Frederick Beltingham saw the probability of all his schemes being frustrated even by his own act. If Henrietta had time to send her warning as he himself had suggested, such intimations as she might afford, together with the somewhat rash hints of his intentions which Lord Alcester had just admitted having given, would, he thought, beyond all doubt, induce Gertrude to secure herself from further molestation by instant flight, before he had time even to lay out his plans.

"You left her five or six hours to consider!" exclaimed the knight; "say, to run away, Alcester. Well, that is one excellent mode of getting over your boast. If she be gone you know not whither, of course the fulfilment is impossible.

A man cannot move mountains, nor always bring back wandering wenches;" and he laughed low and clear.

Lord Alcester was not so angry as if the charge had been well founded. "You are mistaken, Beltingham," he replied; "I have taken care she shall not escape. I have placed two stout men on each of the three roads, with orders to stop her, and turn her back if she appears on either of them."

"Oh, unskilled in woman's wit!" cried Beltingham; "do you not know that women are witches when they have an object to gain, and will ride through the air on a broomstick? I will bet anything you like, five to one—seven to one, that as soon as she can put up in a small bundle, artificially tied at the corners, one kirtle, one bodice, and pair of mittens, to appear on Sunday next at the conventicle, she will pass through all your well-instructed guards, as if she were invisible. Nay, perhaps she is gone already. Send down and sec, Alcester; and give your man a hint, if he finds her now, to bring her tenderly up by the arm, for he will not find her an hour hence; or shall I be the messenger?"

"Oh, no," answered the peer, with a sarcastic smile; "we will send one less worthy;" and ringing the hand-bell, he gave the orders which his companion prompted.

Sir Frederick Beltingham walked to the window, while his companion spoke to the servant; for he had learnt caution early, by more than one severe rebuff, without, however, losing any of his daring; and it was not his policy at present, to allow even the servants to see that he took part in the schemes that were going on. Lord Alcester, as soon as his commands were issued, seated himself thoughtfully at the table again, and Sir Frederick Beltingham remained, gazing forth from the casement. But the servant had not quitted the room five minutes, when Beltingham turned his head, and said, in an indifferent tone, "Here is one of your fellows coming up across the park in great haste, Alcester."

The young nobleman sprang to the window, and gazed out; and as the man approached the house he beckoned him to the window, speaking somewhat sharply, and demanding why he had quitted his post.

"Please you, my lord," said the man, "Jones sent me up to tell you that the conjurer fellow, who was here last night, has gone across the east side of the park with four of his blacks, instead of two, and they have done a deal of mischief, so that all the deer will be out, if people don't mind."

Lord Alcester's face flushed with anger. "What were the keepers about?" he exclaimed. "Why did you not stop him yourselves? Which way did he come?"

Of these three questions, the man chose the last for an

answer, saying, "He seemed to come straight from Wincombe, my lord. We saw him riding along the road with what looked like an old woman, in a white sheet, in the middle of the blacks. Jones says he is sure it is a witch. We did not see them for a minute or two, after they got under the hill, and amongst the trees, for our orders were to keep out of sight of the cottage; but when I found they did not show themselves again so fast as might be, I thought I might as well go down to the meadow and take a look; and there I saw them all gathered together round the cottage-door, and the old woman just getting upon her horse again. After that they came dashing past, within fifty yards of us, and straight at the park paling. The conjurer fellow went over at once, as if he had been fox-hunting, but the blacks did not seem to like that, and pulled out their long crooked swords. Down came the paling in a minute, and away they all went across the park like devils."

Lord Alcester swore a furious oath, and vowed by all that he held sacred, he would punish the offenders before night-fall; but Sir Frederick Beltingham, with his cool prudence somewhat forgotten, and a good deal more eagerness than he usually displayed, questioned the man as to whether he was sure that the people had gone into the cottage, and where the cottage itself lay.

"Pooh, pooh!" cried Lord Alcester, "this is trifling."

"Not so much as you think," replied the knight; "I will take you any odds you like that the girl is gone, and that this juggler has contrived to conjure her away."

"That we shall soon know," said Lord Alcester, with anger and impatience in his tone. And turning to the man, he added—"Away to the stables; have out all the horses in an instant; bid all the men you can find, arm and mount, and come round upon the terrace."

"All! my lord?" said the man, with some surprise.

"Ay, all!—every one!—pages and all!" cried his master. "We are not in time of war—my house will defend itself. You will go with us, Beltingham, will you not?"

"Oh, certainly," answered the knight. "I will go and tell my people to get ready. As we have to deal with the devil, it seems, the more there are to meet him the better." Walking away with a sneering smile on his lips, Sir Frederick Beltingham retired to his own room, and laughed. He soon grew more serious, however, and muttered between his teeth, "Alcester is a fool. By his neglect he has spoiled my plan altogether.—Perhaps we may catch her, after all," he continued, after some thought; "and once in my hands, with the information I possess, she is mine; unless, indeed, she be

like a young pelican poult, which feeds upon a parent's blood. She won't do that—she won't do that."

Thus saying, he drew on a large pair of riding-boots, called his chief servant from the neighbouring room, and gave orders that he himself, the page, and two grooms whom he had brought with him to Malwood, should instantly prepare to ride with him on an expedition. Having done this, and given a minute or two to thought, he descended once more to the dining-hall, where he found his companion, Lord Alcester, walking up and down with an irritable look.

"It is as you say," cried the peer, as soon as he entered. "The girl is gone; the cottage empty; and these lazy fools are keeping me so long for the horses, that the roving vagabond who has carried her off will be half across the country before I am in the saddle—not that I care for the girl—a light hypocritical wanton, to fly with a fellow she can hardly know!"

"It is all the black beard, depend upon it," said Beltingham, in his usual tone of badinage; "and a stupendous beard it is. I was one time minded to think that he had borrowed it from his horse's tail, till I looked to the bottom of things; but getting nearer him before he went, I had the pleasure of seeing the stems growing out of their own ground, near his mouth, like bulrushes by the side of a pond. A marvellous effect has such a beard on most female hearts—I would adopt it myself, but that my decoration is somewhat foxy. Come, Alcester, you are growing impatient; let us go to the stables ourselves and mount there, it will save a few minutes, at all events."

Lord Alcester readily complied; but the scene of confusion and bustle presented by the stable-yard was not to be brought into order, even by his presence, for some time, and about a quarter of an hour elapsed before the whole party were mounted and on their way.

Lord Alcester was riding straight towards the park gates; but Sir Frederick Beltingham suggested that it would be better to follow the course of the enclosure till they reached the spot where the fugitives had passed out.

"Where they can go, we can go," he said; "and we shall come at once upon the tracks of their horses."

This method of proceeding was adopted, and at the distance of about a mile from the house a breach was found in the paling of nearly twenty yards in width, in a sandy lane, on the other side of which the prints of numerous horses' feet were to be seen. Lord Alcester rode on furiously in the direction which they took; but Sir Frederick Beltingham paused, dismounted, and examined the traces with great care

and attention. He then sprang into the saddle again, and galloped after his friend.

From Malwood Park, along a narrow country road, and then to the left, through a long shady lane, the marks of hoofs led the pursuing party to a common, where the track was lost and found more than once. At length the traces were perceived again, entering the high road; and about a mile further appeared the very significant sign of the Goose in Spectacles. Every sort of information was afforded to his noble neighbour, Lord Alcester, by the learned master, Joseph Barnacle, who was not only inclined to tell all he knew, but all that he imagined also. From him it was discovered that, about eight o'clock that morning, some men, black and white, had arrived with a curious-looking car, like a gilt cockle-shell, that only two of the party could speak English, and that those who could showed great abstinence in the use of that powerful tongue. They had remained there for some hours the host said, till, about three-quarters of an hour before the noble lord's coming, they were joined by six other persons, five men and one who seemed to be a woman, wrapped up in a large white sort of cloak on which Master Barnacle bestowed the name of a Caimakan. Nobody saw the woman's face, he said—from which he concluded that she must be an eastern princess in disguise,—and the whole party set out again immediately after the man with the black beard had bestowed upon each of the last-arrived horses a couple of quarts of strong ale, which proved to the landlord's conviction that he must be a follower of Mahomet; for who but an infidel, he asked, would give Christian drink to brute beasts? As far as the road lay in sight he assured Lord Alcester that the party had followed it; but what became of them after, he could not say; neither could any of his servants give further information, for they were of a somewhat boorish kind; and though the maids had been wonderfully alarmed at the sight of so many blacks, they did not, as women generally do, look after what had frightened them.

With this scanty intelligence, the pursuing party rode on; but the roads of those days were much more favourable to the young nobleman's enterprise than those of the present time would have been. In the first place they were sandy, retaining long the print of whatever passed over them; and in the next, they were comparatively but little frequented, so that there was no great confusion of traces. The wheels of the car had left long ruts, unlike any other marks; and thus assisted, Lord Alcester and Beltingham followed the track for two miles along the high road, and then for two miles more

upon a by-way, which at length divided into two as it rose over the hills.

Here, however, a difficulty occurred; for at the bifurcation of the road it was evident that the party which they were chasing had divided. The car and a number of horses had taken the right-hand path; and prints of the feet of four distinct horses appeared upon the left. Lord Alcester at once decided upon the right hand. The men were certain, he said, to put the girl into the car; and besides, Master Barnacle had informed him that in it the eastern princess had quitted his inn-yard, so that there was no doubt, the young nobleman affirmed, that she would be found to the right, and the juggler with her.

"I do not doubt it, Alcester," answered Sir Frederick Beltingham; "but it is as well to make sure of both. I, my three servants, and the page, will take to the left, while you ride on the other way. We shall have only four persons to cope with if we overtake them; and you have plenty with you."

"Oh, plenty, plenty!" said Lord Alcester; "but where shall we meet? for it may be late ere have done. Say the Sceptre at Illington? do you know it?"

"I will find it easily," answered Beltingham. "Good luck attend you!" and he rode away. As soon, however, as he was out of sight of the other party, he halted, and once more dismounted to examine the traces. There was one set of hoof-marks much less and more delicately shaped than the others, and one rather larger, but of a peculiar form, which I need not pause to describe; and, mounting again, Sir Frederick pursued his way at even a more furious pace than before, with very little consideration for his horse's wind, till, reaching the top of the first line of wavy hills, he paused and gazed, scanning every road and path which seemed to lead onward.

CHAPTER XI.

THE cottage inhabited by Gertrude Ellerton had remained undisturbed for an hour after the juggler had left it. The apprehensions which Lord Alcester's visit and threats had caused began to die away in a heart naturally courageous; and the fair girl even doubted whether his menaces were not idle words uttered without any intention of fulfilment. She hoped that she should not be called upon to execute her plan of flight before Francis de Vipont returned, and that she might be able to consult him as to its necessity. Her only anxiety was lest what she felt herself bound to tell him might

produce a dangerous dispute between him and his relation. This renewed feeling of security, however, was not destined to last long. At the end of an hour, old dame Hennage went down to the stream to procure water for their plain morning meal, and returned to the cottage trembling with fear, after a few minutes' absence, to tell Gertrude that she had seen two parties of men watching the road on either hand. "Run up, my bird, run up," cried the old woman, "and see out of your window if there is any one on the path through the wood. A mouse could not get out by the front door without being seen in a minute, for the men on the left there look down upon the bridge also!"

Gertrude hurried to her chamber, and from a lattice which opened towards the garden saw two servants lolling listlessly under the trees. The cottage, in fact, was in a state of regular blockade; and for an instant Gertrude felt sick at heart with the apprehension of renewed dangers and difficulties, of which she could not see a probable termination. It is sad when, after the experience of many of the world's ills, we have enjoyed a short period of peaceful sunshine, and have hoped that still brighter days may come, to see the clouds gather again upon the horizon, and the distant thunder begin to roar.

The mind of Gertrude Ellerton was not easily to be depressed, however; and after a confused sensation of alarm and grief had subsided, she made hasty preparations for departure, gaining confidence herself from the confident tone in which the juggler had spoken of her escape. She recollected that although Lord Alcester's men might venture to stop her if she were to try to pass them, it was not likely they would dare to forbid to others the passage of a public road; and she trusted that long ere the hour which Lord Alcester had named for taking her forcibly from her place of refuge, either her lover, or he who had promised to protect her in her flight, would arrive.

Her expectations were fulfilled sooner than she had anticipated; for ere she had concluded the brief note which she thought it but right to leave for Francis de Vipont, in case of her being called upon to fly before he came, the sound of several horses' feet could be heard beating the road; and, running to the window, she beheld five strangely-clothed cavaliers stop at the door of the cottage. But the sight of the horseman at their head removed all fear; and knowing that the moment of departure was come, she hurried back to write the last few words, while old Martha Hennage cautiously opened the door, and drew back with a low cry of surprise and alarm as she saw two black men in Oriental costume lift

what appeared a decrepit woman from a jennet, and carry her towards the cottage.

"Quick, Gertrude, quick!" cried the juggler, coming in with a hasty step. "Not a moment is to be lost. There are parties watching on the road, and if they unite we may have to shed blood, which I would fain avoid."

Gertrude folded her note and rose, saying, "I am ready: but who, in the name of Heaven, is this? Surely it is a puppet!"

"Your representative, dear lady," replied the juggler, with a smile, "whose place and clothing you must now take. Here, put on this turban, and wrap the caftan round you. The mask one of my slaves shall put in his wallet; then nothing remains but a heap of straw. How many a bright lady, stripped of her gay clothing and false face, would be little better! But come, Gertrude; and you, good dame, remember that if questioned you must give no information of any kind." Fear not their threats for they dare not harm you. Come, sweet child, come!"

Gertrude was ready in a moment: the turban was placed upon her head; a long, shroud like robe cast over her head and shoulders, and brought round over her face so as to leave nothing but the beautiful eyes uncovered. So long, indeed, was the robe, that it was with difficulty she walked to the side of the horse, on the back of which one of the black men placed her, while the juggler assisted with his left hand, saying, "I must spare my right arm, Gertrude, lest my wound should become troublesome before it is necessary to draw the sword."

"God forbid that it should become necessary at all!" replied the lady; and her companion having given some orders in a language which she did not understand, the horses were put in motion, and swept round within sight of two of Lord Alcester's servants, who stood staring at them in stupid astonishment.

As the man afterwards described to his lord, the juggler pushed his horse at the park paling, and cleared it in an instant; the black men drew their scimitars, on orders apparently previously given: the top rail of the fence was cut through at a blow, and the paling pushed down without difficulty. On dashed the juggler again, as soon as Gertrude was by his side, through the brown woods, and over the silky savannas of the park, the long, dry, yellow grass of which was waving in the morning wind like a rippled sea. There seemed to be a burst of joyous satisfaction in the daring power with which the tall, strong man galloped on, unopposed, across the whole breadth of Lord Alcester's park. His

whole chest seemed to expand, and his nostrils extended themselves like those of the horse he bestrode, while with his head high, his figure erect, and a light hand upon the rein, he led the way straight towards the opposite side of the enclosure.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, with a triumphant smile, looking towards Gertrude, "here I ride as free as a king. Let them tremble who sit in the wrong places. Better days are coming."

"God grant it!" cried Gertrude; "and in truth, once more galloping along on a horse's back, I feel as if old times were returning indeed."

"They will, they will," answered the juggler; "yet we must not be rash in our confidence; as long as Danby and the lords are in the Tower, your father's situation will be extremely perilous."

The next moment they reached the park paling again; and a broad breach was made in it, as before. Then riding on at full speed, they never drew a rein till they came within sight of the little inn which Lord Francis Vipont had entered a few moments before they reached it. Little did Gertrude know who was so near her; and after a very brief delay, she was placed in the car, and the whole party set out again towards the hills.

In truth the fair girl, though closely wrapped from every eye, could hardly persuade herself that she would not be seen and recognised in the tawdry vehicle that bore her; but when she expressed a wish to ride in preference, the juggler replied, in a low tone, "You shall, dear Gertrude, in a few minutes; but we must employ all means to deceive them."

As soon as they had quitted the high road, Gertrude mounted the jennet again, and somewhat slackening their pace, they climbed the first rises of the upland till they reached the bifurcation of the road. There, a wide view was to be obtained over the country below, and the juggler paused, and turning round, gazed over hill and plain, corn-field and meadow, as they stretched out beneath his eye all sparkling in the sunshine.

"Look there," he said at length, pointing to a spot some four miles distant, "that foolish lad is following. He has got tidings quickly, and has pursued the track not amiss, sweet lady."

"Oh, let us on fast," answered Gertrude, whose eye rested on a moving body, which, though the distance rendered it somewhat indistinct, was not to be mistaken for anything but a numerous party of horsemen.

"And are you afraid, Gertrude?" said the juggler; "those

courtly apes below, and their troop of mercenaries, would be caught in a less pleasant feat than they dream of; were their efforts to reach us to prove successful. There are sharp things in those sheaths, Gertrude; but though probably there is not a gourd growing between Lambeth and the Land's-end, which has less brains in it than the skull of any man there present, I should be sorry to see the heads dropping off like apples in a storm, as has sometimes been the case in Africa."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Gertrude; "I beseech you do not speak of such horrors, if you would have me retain any courage at all. Let us on and avoid them."

"So be it, then," cried the juggler; "but the first thing is to deceive them as to our course. Here we will separate," he continued, addressing one of the two white men who were with him; "I will take three of the Moors with me. You go on with the rest to Illington, Ralph. You will find the fair just beginning; make everything ready against I come, as I told you; and hark, a word in your ear."

Dismounting from his horse, the man approached his master, and the juggler gave him some orders in a low voice, adding aloud, at the end, "Let her be decent, if you could get such a one, and promise her good payment and two guineas to her master, if he consents. Now away, and make haste: for these people must not overtake you till you are in the fair."

He then called three of the black men from the rest and rode rapidly forward on the left-hand road. Only once he halted to breathe the horses, and look behind; but nothing was now to be seen as far as the eye could reach; and resuming their course, the little party wound on through the paths and lanes which had been pursued by Lord Francis Vipont, somewhat less than an hour before. At length the solitary house and the little wood in the bosom of the hills, came in sight, and turning to Gertrude, the juggler said, "I must pause here for a short time, but we are a full hour before them."

"There are several horses already at the door," said Gertrude, gazing anxiously forward.

"I know it," replied the juggler; "I trust to find friends there, and also to hear that a place of security is prepared for you."

"There is Ellerton," observed the lady, looking up where, over the edge of the hill, the castle appeared towering amongst the distant woods; "I never thought to see it again."

"Nevertheless, I trust the day will yet come," said the

juggler, laying his hand kindly upon hers, "when Gertrude will be the lady of the castle."

Gertrude shook her head sadly, but merely answered, "Are we not passing too near? If we were to meet the Earl, my mother would blame me, I am sure."

"Poor child," said the juggler, "you fancy every one must know who is beneath this disguise as well as you do. Veiled as you are now, I would lead you to-morrow through the Earl's halls, and pass you on him for a Mauritanian princess. I am much minded to go there myself, this night, and mock him with some quaint shows."

"Oh, be cautious, be cautious," cried Gertrude, in a tone of alarm; but the juggler only laughed, and the next moment they reached the door of the little inn.

Instantly a man came forth, and while the blacks sat motionless on their horses, took the juggler's bridle, hat in hand. The person to whom he rendered this attention sprang lightly to the ground, and the landlord of the inn, for he it was, took his hand and kissed it, with tears in his eyes, murmuring, "This is a joyful day indeed!"

"To me it is so," answered the juggler, "and to you, I am sure, Wellstead." Then dropping his voice, he asked some questions in a whisper, and the man replied—"Yes, sir, he has been waiting for two hours; these are his horses under the tree. He was going away about half an hour ago, but I ventured to tell him that I was sure the person he waited for would come."

"And my messenger arrived?" said the juggler.

"Yes, sir; and I have done my best," answered the landlord. "There is the cottage where my poor mother lived, and where my sister is now living. It has three or four rooms, and is quite safe; for it is off the road, and the Earl never passes this way, for he has given up riding on horseback. Lord Francis does sometimes. He did this morning; but it is seldom."

The juggler gave a gay look, and kindly smiled to Gertrude Ellerton, and assisted her from her horse, saying, "Go up with this good man to one of the upper rooms. He is an old friend of mine, and will protect any one in whom I take interest. I will join you in two or three minutes." Then speaking to his Moors, he again gave them some directions in the language he always used to them; upon which, taking his horse, and that which had borne Gertrude, he rode round slowly to the back of the house, and disappeared.

"Set a watch, Wellstead," said the juggler, as the landlord was leading Gertrude into the house, "and let me know instantly if any one is seen coming up the hills."

"I will watch myself, sir," said the landlord; and making a sign for him and Gertrude to pass on first, the juggler turned into the room on the left of the passage.

Seated near a table at the further side of the room, with some roast beef and a flagon of strong beer before him, was the same stout old man who had been found there some time before by Lord Francis Vipont. The moment the other entered he rose and gazed at him with an inquiring look, which gradually assumed the expression of surprise. For several moments they both kept silence; but then the juggler asked, "Do you not know me, my lord?"

"The devil!" cried the other. "Upon my life, you are an impudent fellow. You said you would send some one, otherwise I should certainly have written to tell you not to come; for the sharp axe has scarcely forgotten its trade yet. In the name of all the fiends! rash young man, what tempted you to run such a risk?" at the same time he held out his hand to his visitor, and shook his warmly.

"I will tell you what tempted me, my noble lord," replied the juggler: "first, confidence in your good-will and kindness; secondly, confidence in your power and influence; and thirdly, weariness of the life I have been leading, together with some longing to see old friends, and to help those who have been kind to me. This last notion is so strong, that even if you have failed in the efforts you promised to make—and Ormond's promise is as good as his bond—I believe I shall remain and take my chance; for I am engaged in some matters of friendship I will not quit—so that some days I must stay, if death itself be the consequence."

The old nobleman gazed at him for a minute or two, and then burst into a laugh. "Upon my life!" he said, "I think you might stay at all events; for that furious beard and madman's dress are as good as an act of oblivion. But you may shave your chin, lad, and put on Christian apparel when you like. Here are the papers sealed up to send to you: first, a reversal of the outlawry—"

"But there was none," replied the juggler; "if you recollect, that was avoided."

"I know, I know," cried the other, interrupting him; "but I have made all sure. There is no knowing in these days what tricks the law will play. If we said there was no outlawry, Jeffries or North might say then there ought to have been one; and if we said there was no conviction, they would perhaps declare that the King could not pardon any proved crimes; and if we said there was no prosecution, they might require one to take place, that you might cast yourself upon the royal mercy. So I had Wilson, a shrewd

lawyer, when I found majesty in a complying mood and Hallifax away, and we had a reversal of the outlawry which did not exist, and a *nolle prosequi* I think they call it, entered at the tail of the depositions, and a free pardon under the sign manual. We had hard work to carry it all through; but the Duke helped kindly, on account of your grandmother; and Secretary Jenkins was very civil; and Seymour did not appear. But there is one crime which is not included in the pardon, you outrageous youth. You have kept me waiting at least two hours, and forced me to eat the toughest beef on this side Calais, just to pass the time."

"Give me your pardon, too, then, my good lord," replied the juggler; "but the truth is, I have been detained by many things. I was set upon last night by several ruffians,—for they deserve no other name, and smartly wounded. I found shelter in a cottage where a poor girl tended me, who, as I afterwards discovered, was suffering shameful persecution from some of the same party who had hurt me. Her I had to deliver this morning, and this is excuse enough for the chivalrous Ormond. But thanks, deep, heartfelt thanks are now due to my generous friend and my poor father's dear comrade in arms."

"There, there," said the old nobleman, "no more of that. I have not time to hear such nonsense, and if you have aught else to say to me on more reasonable subjects, you must come to London; for I must away at once, otherwise they will think me plotting."

"But about Sir William Ellerton," said the juggler, as the Duke gathered up his large buckskin gloves, and looked round for his hat and sword.

"Useless at present," said the Duke; "we can do but little there, at best. The estates, you know, have been granted away, so they are gone for ever. Then for the reversal we must wait a while. You must make other interest, my friend, though I will do what I can; but the black and the white worm, as the allegory has it, which are always gnawing the root of the tree of life, have done a good deal against me, though when those worms—day and night, I mean—will have dried up the sap, I cannot tell. But fare-you-well, lad, and shave your chin as soon as may be.—Ho! landlord, my horses! Bid them hustle there."

"This is a case I am deeply interested in," said the juggler, detaining him; "if you can do nought yourself, my good lord, at least give me some advice how I may best move the King on behalf of my noble friend."

"Give the Duchess of Portsmouth ten thousand pounds," replied the Duke, abruptly; "but no, I do but jest; he will

sport with justice, but will not sell it. You must try Hallifax or Sunderland—but come to London—come to London, and we will speak further.” Thus saying, he moved to the door, leaving the juggler standing with a sealed packet in his hand.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE is something certainly in true love that is very ennobling. Man wrapt up in his selfishness seldom feels any emotion with which the thought of his personal convenience, pleasure, or advantage, does not in some degree mingle. Alas! that it should be so; but nevertheless, from the hero to the knife-grinder, such is almost universally the case; and he who analyses his own emotions, or scrutinizes the conduct of others, will find a little drop of selfishness constantly stealing into the stream of thought and action, and in proportion to its amount, leaving it pure and bright, or rendering it foul and turbid. Love—I speak of real love—for as the gilding on a piece of base metal makes it to the eye like pure gold, so the name of love covers in this world many of the basest passions of our nature,—love is the feeling which perhaps has the least alloy of selfishness. How much more terrible is the apprehension which we feel for the danger of those we love, than any which we can experience for ourselves! The heart that never throbbed with a quicker pulse at the sight of danger or the approach of death, will flutter like a chained bird if either danger or death come near the object of affection; and not the utmost longing of our nature for any advantage or delight can match the eager desire of the heart for the safety, the welfare, the happiness of the beloved.

I will not describe the feelings with which Lord Francis Vipont rode along the path, from the cottage where he had expected to find Gertrude, to Malwood House. He had determined to ascertain for himself that she had not been intercepted in her flight, and the very idea made his heart burn with feelings of anger which it required a struggle with himself to suppress. Nor was the distance so great as to allow his feelings time to cool. It is very probable that had he met Lord Alcester at that moment, a dispute would have ensued which could only have ended in bloodshed, but such was not destined to be the case.

At the distance of about a couple of hundred yards from the terrace on which the house stood, was a group of four or five old elms, wide in the branches, seamed in the bark, and weathered, if one may so call it, with green stunted twigs issuing out of the trunk, from the root to the first large

limbs. Underneath these he left his three companions, and, giving his horse to one of them to hold, advanced alone to the principal entrance of the house.

The rope of a large bell hung dangling on the right, and pulling it with some of the impatience which was in his heart, he made the old hall echo with the sound. Nobody came, however, in answer to his loud appeal; and after waiting for little more than a minute, Lord Francis, certain that the bell must have been heard by some of the servants, unless they were all very eagerly employed, pushed the door open and went in. All was silent, and the house seemed deserted. In many old buildings of that period the great doors opened at once into the hall; but such was not the case here, and the chief entrance—a little below the general level of the ground floor—displayed, as soon as the door was thrown back, three stone steps, leading to a long and not very broad passage, with the foot of the great staircase appearing about ten yards in advance, and several doorways beyond. A light from a window on the stairs fell across the pavement, and served to dispel a part of the obscurity, but still the passage was very dark. Lord Francis, however, knew the house from infancy, and walked on, thinking it somewhat strange that not one of all the many servants had appeared, and somewhat doubting the occupation in which he might find them engaged. He first opened a door on the left, where, in the days of the old Earl, a porter, or a porter's lad, was invariably to be found; but the room was vacant, and quickening his pace, he turned to the right into the great hall. At the moment when he first set foot in it there was no one there; but the next instant a door at the further end opened suddenly, and a graceful figure, with a veil thrown back from the head, appeared, approaching with eyes raised towards him, and a look of sad inquiry on the face, over which the many-coloured light that streamed through a stained glass window cast a strange unearthly kind of gleam.

It was long since Lord Francis had seen Henrietta Compton; and when last he beheld her, she had been in the first fresh bloom of youthful beauty, with the rose unworn by the canker-worm of care, the lily unseared by the hot blast of remorse. He could hardly believe that the pale lady before him, with the dark, melancholy eyes, was the gay, joyous Henrietta Compton. There were the same fine-cut features, however, the same graceful, easy movement of the beautiful limbs; and, advancing to meet her, he instinctively held out his hand as to an old friend, although he had never had more than a mere passing acquaintance with the fair unhappy girl.

Henrietta did not take it, however ; but with a low inclination of the head, and a cheek which had become crimson, she said, "Lord Francis de Vipont, I believe. You have brought me bad tidings?"

"No, indeed," answered Francis ; "I come to seek tidings, dear lady, not to give them. Is my cousin Alcester in the house? I can find no servant to inquire."

"He has taken them all with him," replied the lady, "leaving no one but myself and some women here. I found the place as if deserted when I returned a few minutes ago."

"Then he has gone in pursuit," said the young nobleman, thoughtfully. "Dear lady, I must have information, and you can give it, I know ; for I found a letter signed by you in the cottage ; and I thank you for that letter to one innocent and good, for whom I feel the deepest interest. Whither has she gone? for fled she certainly has, to escape one who has wronged you and insulted her. I beseech you tell me ; for she must and shall have protection."

Henrietta Compton gazed at him stedfastly and sadly for a moment. "You too," she said at length—"you too! Are women, then, but as hares, as deer, or any other beast of the chase, to be hunted down and pursued by every man who sets eyes upon them? Oh! my lord, I had thought better of you than this. Deny it not. What have you to do with a cottage girl? What interest should a man in your station take in a poor thing like this? What means all this agitation—all this eagerness? Fie upon it!—fie upon it!—I wonder if men believe that God can see and punish."

"Lady, you do me wrong," said Lord Francis Vipont ; "I am not the villain you suppose me. I own boldly and at once that I am eager, that I am agitated, that I do take as deep interest in this cottage girl as man can take in woman ; and yet I call Heaven to witness that there is not in my heart towards her one feeling that is not pure, and true, and honest. Each man may have his secrets, and most men have some ; but you will find, ere long, that in what I now say, I speak the simple truth."

"I know not how that can be," said Henrietta, thoughtfully. "Do you mean, my lord, that you would marry her?"

"Ay, whenever she will marry me," answered the young nobleman, with a smile. "But, I beseech you, tell me what course they have taken. They cannot have gone far ; and more depends upon her having immediate aid and support than you imagine."

"I will trust you," said Henrietta ; "although, after all I know and have undergone, I believe it is folly to trust any

man, either in the greatest or in the least of things. Yet you have always borne a high name. Do you pledge your honour and your faith?"

"I do," answered Lord Francis. "I assure you, by all that is most sacred, that not passion, nor opportunity, nor even thoughtless love, would induce me to wrong her by a word. What can I say more?"

"I will tell you all I know then," answered Henrietta, "and you must pick intelligence from it as you may. A villain gave me the information of her being here, and of Lord Alcester's pursuit. I knew him to be a villain; but as I saw he had objects of his own to answer by telling me, I believed him, though a more poisonous serpent never lived."

"Sir Frederick Beltingham?" said the young nobleman, gazing in her face.

Henrietta bowed her head slowly, in token of assent, and then continued,—“I resolved she should have warning; and as soon as I knew they had sat down to the morning meal, I gathered from my woman, whither it was that Lord Alcester's steps so often tended. I then wrote those hasty lines, which you seem to have read, and hurried down to the cottage through the woods, finding that he had set spies or guards on all the usual roads. When not far from the place, I heard the sound of horses' feet beating sharply the soft turf of the park; and hidden behind a tree, I saw sweeping past me, and taking an easterly direction, a strange cavalcade, apparently of Moors, mounted on slight but beautiful horses, as light-footed as deer. In the midst was a shrouded figure on a woman's saddle, and at their head a tall and powerful man, of whom more hereafter. As soon as they were gone, I hurried down to the cottage, and found it vacant; but I left the letter I had written, not comprehending that she had already fled. When I returned, however, I not only found that such was the case, but that Lord Alcester had already set out in pursuit, with every man and boy that could bestride a horse.”

“They must be followed at once!” exclaimed Lord Francis, with his cheek glowing, and lip quivering.

“Yet stay and hear me out,” said the lady; “for as yet you know not why, in my own mind, I connect the flight of the poor girl with that same party of Moors.”

“It was not her whom you saw,” replied Lord Francis, “she has fled on foot, depend upon it.”

“You are too quick,” answered the lady; “the man at their head came hither last night as a juggler, with two of those black slaves. I saw and heard the whole from the

gallery yonder. He did very wonderful things; made a whole line of spectres cross the wall, and last of all, Lord Alcester's own father, whom I remember well, with an air and attitude of stern displeasure, as if reproving his son's deeds. He showed them other things, and told them many a bitter truth, which did not please them well; but from all I saw and gathered, I am convinced that, by some means, human or superhuman, that man has a deep and thorough knowledge of all that has been taking place here, and sought to warn Lord Alcester against pursuing any further the reckless course of evil he has hitherto trod. Who the woman was in the midst of the troop this morning, I cannot say; for neither face nor figure could be seen, but she sat her horse well and gracefully. It was just the hour at which the girl fled this morning; all the roads from the cottage were watched, so that she could not pass on foot; and I find from the rumour amongst the women, that the blacks threw down the paling of the park, and it is in their pursuit Lord Alcester has gone. Now, I have told you all, and you can leave me to my loneliness and sorrow."

"I must leave you, I fear, dear lady," said Lord Francis, in a kindly tone, taking her unresisting hand; "but yet, believe me, Mrs. Compton, I grieve for you much. I know you have been deeply, sadly wronged; and though I see not how I can aid you, yet should you ever need assistance, kindness, or protection, you shall find me ready and willing to give it, upon my honour."

"Do I not need it now?" said Henrietta Compton. "Do I not need advice, consolation, support?"

"Were I to give advice," said Lord Francis, "I fear that you might think me harsh and unkind, even when I sought but your own happiness. Oh, dear lady, if I have judged you rightly, you can never have known peace since you quitted your own true home, since you linked yourself to one who has not proved himself worthy of your love and confidence; and never will your heart feel rest till you have left him."

"Left him!" said Henrietta, bitterly, "to go whither, my good lord? What home have I now? What place of refuge? Who will open their arms to receive the outcast? What face will smile on her return? Who would even give me food, or raiment, or shelter? Has he not put a bar between me and kindred affection for ever? Has he left me friend, or home, or support, or trust? He has taken from me all but what depends upon himself, and denied much of that which he could give, and promised. I was no light coquette, no artful coquette, I sought not to win or to ensnare. He sought me, wooed long, and won at length the love

and trust he sought. Then vowed, but to break his vows, and now—oh, God, what does he now?"

"Protection and support you shall have," said Lord Francis, "ay, and kindness too, if you will but break this fatal bond. My sister——"

"No, no!" cried Henrietta vehemently, "that cannot be. The noble and the pure would scorn me. It cannot be, my lord. I am his slave in his opinion. In my own—ay, and in God's sight, I am his wife. I have none to cling to but him; I have none to hope from but him. I will never leave him with life and my own will. Fare-you-well! God speed you on your way! I do believe you are too wise and good to spill blood, even in your haste; and I do not judge it wrong to prevent greater evil than has already been committed, by telling you all I know. If I have erred, God forgive me! Farewell!" and, turning away, she quitted the hall.

Lord Francis Vipont gazed after her sadly for a moment, and then hastened out to rejoin those whom he had left waiting for him in the park. But little consultation was necessary in order to decide their movements; and following nearly the same course as Lord Alcester, they soon came upon his track. The large party which accompanied him had attracted attention all along the roads he had followed, and plentiful information was obtained, now from a countryman, now from the host of the Goose-in-Spectacles, now from a cottager near the spot where he had turned from the high road. At length, Lord Francis Vipont found himself at the spot where the by-way divided into two. But the number of hoof-marks upon the right-hand path decided his movements, and he pursued it till the steeple and houses of Illington, with the old trees sweeping round the little town, came in sight; and, to his satisfaction, he found, from some of the peasantry returning from the fair, that a gentleman and a number of servants had just ridden in before him. To the question whether there was a lady in the company, the answer was "No;" and so far satisfied, he went on without slackening his speed, till he reached the market-place.

The scene which presented itself was a gay and busy one. Fairs in the days of Charles II. were very different from those which are seen in England at present; and the original objects which first brought numbers of men together at certain places and at certain seasons were not altogether forgotten. Traffic was still held in view; and, to the country fair, not only itinerant merchants brought their goods for sale, but the shopkeepers of neighbouring towns (sometimes at the distance of twenty or thirty miles) sent large packages of their various wares on pack-horses, or in waggons. There the farmers

wife and daughters supplied themselves with ribbons and finery ; there the thrifty housewife purchased her stock of woollen goods, or supplied any deficiency which the idleness of maids, or the failure of her crop of flax, might have left in her store of linen. There servants sought places, and masters, servants ; and horses and cattle—ranged generally on the outside of the mart—with sometimes also both pigs and sheep, added to the confusion, noise, and dirt of the whole scene. To the fair, also, the quack doctor and wandering tooth-drawer brought their impudence, their eloquence, and their skill ; and there, too, the conjurer, the juggler, the exhibitor of monsters of all kinds, and the professional merry-Andrew, found the means of conveying the money of the simple and the marvel-loving into their own pouches.

It was over such a scene as this that the eyes of Lord Francis de Vipont wandered, as he pulled up his horse at the highest point of the market-place, immediately in front of the town-house. On his right were a group of lads and lasses in their holiday attire, with knots of ribbon in their breasts and button-holes. On the left was a doctor mounted on a cart, and holding out a vial of brown liquid in his hand, which he pronounced, with awful asseverations, to be a sovereign cure for wounds, bruises, sprains, gout and consumption, dropsy and cholic, the stone and apoplexy, palsy and catarrh. Hardly an ill that flesh is heir to was not enumerated in the list of those for which his elixir was an infallible remedy ; and many a peasant who had quietly borne his portion of infirmities for the last six months, and might have borne them for six years longer with no great risk, now hurried up to secure a few drops of the precious balm, which the proprietor assured him was worth a guinea a drop, though he humanely sold it for a groat a vialful, out of pure philanthropy.

Further on, a rustic was struggling under the agonizing forceps of a stout short man, who held his head between his knees as in a vice, till he had torn a monstrous grinder from his bleeding jaws ; and a jack-pudding near him, upon a painted stage, was making the poor patient food for merriment to a little congregation assembled before his booth. All around were stalls and tents with linens, woollens, coarse cotton stuffs, ribbons, toys, gingerbread, meat pies, and comfits ; while a rear-guard of pigs and horses, sheep, geese, and oxen, were seen stretching far away down into the High-street. But one object seemed to afford greater attraction than any in the fair, and on it too the young nobleman's eyes were instantly fixed. Nearly in the centre of the market-place, and not far from a stone cross, a small space of ground was parted off from the rest by a stout railing : and, in the midst, appeared

a splendid gilt car, raising above the multitude which surrounded, two human figures. The horses had been taken out of the car to give it greater space, and at each of the corners of the enclosure stood a Moor, dressed in rich oriental costume, and bearing a naked scimitar in his hand. The figures in the car itself were those of a female closely veiled, and wrapped from head to foot in a loose white woollen shroud; and a man, fully six feet in height, with an enormous black beard, and immense quantity of coal-black hair, escaping in rich curls from beneath a tall-pointed Persian cap. Over his shoulders was cast a loose robe of green and gold, and in his hand he bore a polished wand, apparently of ivory.

"That is the fellow whom I saw at the inn two or three hours ago, my lord," said Dick Myrtle, "with his black-amours and the woman."

Francis de Vipont made no reply, for his eyes were by this time attracted to other objects, which soon caught the sight of his companion also.

"There goes Lord Alcester and his people," continued Dick. "He is making his way up to the car as hard as he can push; and look there, my lord, that fellow on his right hand is the Illington constable. I know him well, a cowardly vermin—see how he is shouldering the folks out of the great man's way. If any of them were to turn and put a fist in his face, he would scud like a hare new started from her form."

But still Lord Francis was silent: something seemed to move him a good deal, and his cheek turned a little pale, as if with strong emotion. At length he said, in a low tone, "We must be there too, Dick.—Here, lad!—you Giles there," he continued, raising his voice, and speaking to a youth from his father's estates, "bring one of your comrades, and take our horses round to the Beagle. Then come after me with any young fellows from our parish that you can find."

"In a minute, my lord," replied the person to whom he spoke, and Lord Francis springing to the ground, threw him the rein, brought his sword a little further forward, and hurried on into the fair, followed by Dick Myrtle and their two companions. Though making his way as fast as he could through the crowd, yet the young nobleman forgot not his courtesy, begging pardon of one whom he put aside, and craving room to pass of another, though he still kept his eyes fixed upon Lord Alcester and his servants, who were rudely struggling on where the press around the juggler's car was thickest.

He was still about fifty paces behind the party he was following, when a number of voices in front cried, "Too bad! too bad!" and Dick Myrtle exclaimed aloud, "He has hit the

girl with the staff. May I never shoot another shot if I do not lick you, master constable, before the day is over."

But the officer was too far off to hear the threat, and the task of vengeance was taken up by another; for a stout country youth, standing beside the girl who had been ill-treated, struck the constable a blow between the eyes, which made him reel back amongst the crowd.

"Well done, Will!" cried half-a-dozen voices, and it is probable that the constable would have suffered severely, had not Lord Alcester, whose object was not to embroil himself with the people, acted with more prudence than he usually displayed.

"You should not have struck the girl," he said, turning to the constable who slunk behind. "There, my friends, there, do not touch him any more—he has been punished enough; but let me pass."

"I do not see what business you have to push us out of our places," replied a sturdy yeoman, "I stand here. Go on, master juggler."

"I must pass in the king's name," said Lord Alcester. "I come to apprehend that impostor, and I command you to assist in executing the law."

"Let him pass, let him pass," exclaimed the rich full voice of the juggler. "His lordship wants to see some specimens of my art, and to hear some of the secrets of nature. Let him pass, and do not be afraid that he will interrupt your pastime! He will only add to it."

The calm and contemptuous tone in which the juggler spoke made the blood rush up into the young peer's face; and, pushing forward, he came close to the barrier, when the voice of the juggler exclaimed in a tone of command, "Stand there!"

"No, I will not," answered Lord Alcester, "for you shall answer for your offences, if not for your foolery, and instantly."

"Then I will make you," replied the juggler; and taking a step forward upon what seemed a crystal footstool in front of the car, while one of his attendants jumped up hastily behind, he presented the point of his wand to the peer's breast, and instantly the young nobleman staggered back, with the feeling as if some one had struck him a numbing blow on the breast.

"Villain!" cried Lord Alcester, "villain!"

"Why, what is the matter?" demanded the juggler. "Witness, all men, that I touched him not! This lord's conscience must be very bad, that he cannot stand a moment before the wand of Truth."

"You have hurt me, villain!" cried the peer, tearing open his vest and shirt; but not the slightest appearance of any injury was perceptible, and a loud laugh from the people added to the rage and mortification of the astonished nobleman. The juggler did not give him time to recover from his surprise, however; but taking the veiled figure beside him by the hand, he led her forward in the car, saying, "Stand forth, Priestess of Nature, and tell the Englishmen around the truth of the quarrel between this lord and me."

By this time Lord Francis de Vipont, with his companions, had reached a spot within a few yards of Lord Alcester; and he turned his eyes eagerly upon the girl, as with a slow hand she threw back the sort of shroud that covered her, and let it fall into the bottom of the car. He was not much surprised—for the eye of true love is not easily deceived—when he beheld a face and form, pretty enough indeed, but very different from those of Gertrude Ellerton, and a dress covered with all the gewgaw ornaments of a strolling actress. Lord Alcester's astonishment, on the contrary, was very visible; for he had not doubted for one moment that Gertrude was before him; and his anger and mortification were equal to his surprise.

"Now, tell the people," cried the juggler, "why Viscount Alcester has followed me from Malwood hither!"

"Because last night you told him truths he loved not," answered the girl, with a theatrical gesture; "and because this morning you threw down the fences of his park."

A merry and well-satisfied laugh broke from the people round, for there was something very pleasant to them in the idea of any invasion of the privileges of the higher orders.

"Ay, that is what old Noll used to do," said one to another; "he disparked many a park."

"Had I a right to do what I did?" cried the juggler aloud, addressing the girl.

"You had," was her reply.

"Give me one reason why," said the juggler; "for there be many, but one will suffice."

"You had a right," answered the girl, "because he obstructed the king's highway with parties of men, and there was no other road you could pass without risk of bloodshed, but through his park."

"You are a liar!" cried Lord Alcester aloud; "I never told the men to stop *him*."

"Then who did you tell them to stop?" demanded the juggler.

The peer was silent; and the people cried, "Ha, ha! He will not tell."

With frowning brow and burning cheek, Lord Alcester turned to one of his servants, and whispered a few words in his ear. The man departed instantly; and, folding his arms upon his chest, Lord Alcester remained gazing at the juggler, without uttering another word.

Drawing the large cloak round her again, and casting the hood over her forehead, the girl drew back a step; and taking no further notice of the young nobleman, but by a few words, apparently of direction to his attendants, the juggler resumed the task of amusing the people with manifold exhibitions of skill, in which the resources of physical science were brought much more into play than was ordinary at that time. The crowd was enchanted and surprised, a little doubtful, perhaps, as to whether some supernatural agency was not at work, but not a whit the less delighted on that account.

When about ten minutes had elapsed, however, from the other side of the crowd there was heard a cry of "Make room for the Mayor and magistrates!—room for the worshipful Mayor!" and, bustling along through the midst of the people, came two or three of the civic authorities, followed by several officers of the peace. The whole of this party advanced straight towards Lord Alcester, before whom the Mayor bowed to the very ground; and while Lord Francis de Vipont spoke eagerly and quickly with his companion, Dick Myrtle, the Viscount laid a formal charge against the juggler for trespassing upon his park, and breaking down the palings thereof.

"I demand his immediate apprehension," said Lord Alcester, in conclusion, "that the case may be inquired into before the magistrates at once, and that he be committed to take his trial according to due form of law."

The worshipful Mayor said something about a warrant; but the Viscount was for no delay; and he exclaimed impatiently, "No warrant is necessary. He comes clearly under the class of rogues and vagabonds, and may be taken into custody at once as such."

"He has a licence," said the Mayor; "we granted it this morning for the three days of the fair."

Lord Alcester bit his lip, but he was reiterating the charge of trespass, when to the surprise of all, and of none more than the juggler himself, Dick Myrtle pushed his way through the crowd, and addressed the Mayor, saying, "I will be his bail, Master Mayor. Your worship knows me well. The offence is not a great one; and I am good, methinks, for any security that may be required. I will go up with you to the hall, and sign the bond with you directly, for it is a pity that the good people should be stopped in their amusement."

"Hurrah for Dick Myrtle!" cried the mob; "Hurrah for honest Dick!"

"We must have two securities," said the Mayor; and, raising his voice, he added, addressing the juggler, "have you any other bail ready, my friend?"

"I will be his bail," said an elderly man, plainly dressed, and bearing on his legs a large pair of riding-boots, who had been leaning for some time on the other side of the railing. "I believe the man is mad; but that does not matter: I will be his bail."

"May I crave your name, sir?" said the Mayor, looking at him through his spectacles. "You are not known here, I think. I know most men's names hereabout; but I cannot say I know yours."

"The Duke of Ormond," said the elderly man. "Come along, Mr. Mayor; I have seen tomfoolery enough for one day of my life, and I must go; but if I may give this young gentleman some advice, he will get home to his own house, and keep himself quiet; for I suspect he is pickling a rod for his own back, without knowing it."

"What do you mean, my lord Duke?" exclaimed Lord Alcester, turning sharply towards him; "I do not understand you."

"You will find out some day soon," said the Duke, with a significant nod of the head; and, without waiting for further discourse, he led the way towards the town-house, followed by the Mayor and his party.

Lord Alcester paused for a single instant, and there was a bitter struggle between rage and prudence. He would fain have taken that vengeance on the spot, with his own hand, which the law would not grant him; but to shed blood in a public fair was no slight offence, and his adversary was not likely to be unassisted. His black followers or companions were formidable-looking personages; the aspect of the crowd was menacing; and although in those days acts of the most daring violence were of every-day occurrence, the young nobleman was for the time overawed, and slowly followed the Mayor with his servants. He might have another motive also for forbearance. It appeared clear to him, that he had been entirely deceived in supposing that the cottage girl whom he was pursuing had been aided in her flight by the juggler; and disappointment but added to the eagerness which he had previously felt. His resolution was speedily taken to return with all speed to Malwood, and never to cease inquiries till he had discovered Gertrude's retreat. He was turned from his purpose for a time, however, by a servant on horseback,

who met him just by the town-house, and placed a letter in his hands, saying, "From the Earl of Virepont, my lord. I have been to Malwood, and thence followed your lordship hither, for I was to bring back an answer."

Lord Alcester tore open the letter and read. "Tell your lord, with my best thanks," he said, "that I will be at Ellerton Castle almost as soon as you are. Explain where you found me, and that I had no means of writing at hand."

The servant received a reward and departed; but the young nobleman paused several minutes in deep thought ere he proceeded to fulfil his promise of following to Ellerton. At length he seemed to take his resolution, ordered his horses to be brought up, entered the town-house for a few minutes, and then mounted and rode away.

Before the Viscount quitted the town, however, Lord Francis de Vipont was far upon his way towards his father's house. The Earl was out when he reached the gates; and he hurried at once to his sister's room. The appearance of haste and agitation in his whole manner somewhat alarmed the Lady Emmeline; but it was on her brother's account she feared, not on her own; and when, in brief but kindly words, he informed her of the conversation which had taken place between himself and their father, Emmeline felt rather relief than sorrow.

"I feared, dear Francis," she said, with a faint smile, "that something had gone wrong with you. Give yourself no uneasiness on my account, dear brother. You have enough to pain you without thought for Emmeline."

"I must ever have thought for her," replied Lord Francis; "and you must promise me, dear girl, most solemnly, if you would have me know peace, that no inducement, no persuasion, no threats, if it should come to that, will ever induce you to give your hand to Alcester. He is totally unworthy of you. Read that letter, from one whom he has basely injured to one whom he is seeking to injure, and then judge of him as he deserves, Emmeline."

"Give you a promise not to wed him!" said the lady, with a melancholy smile; "do you think it possible, Francis? But I give you that unnecessary promise, as you ask it, and assure you, that could they inflict death as the penalty of refusal, it would have no effect. But I fear nothing; the first word said to myself on the subject shall end all.—But you seem in haste, Francis. It is growing late: are you going forth again?"

"Instantly, dearest," he replied; "but you must ask me no questions, sister mine. I trust that ere long I shall be able to

explain my wanderings, which for a few days may seem strange : I came back but to see you and to seek a fresh horse, and now I must away again."

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH the door fast locked, and the windows all closed, good dame Hennage sat in the cottage which Gertrude had quitted in the morning. The sun had sunk below the horizon nearly an hour : no moon had yet risen, and by her solitary candle the old woman strove to amuse the time in spinning, though her hand trembled with fear rather than age ; and every breath of wind that shook the casement or sighed in the chimney, rendered her terror greater. She had quitted the cottage to escape the vengeance of Lord Alcester, as soon as she found that one party of his men, at least, had been withdrawn ; and she had wandered about till sunset without food, forming plans as to what she should say if she were carried up to the peer's house to give an account of her young mistress's evasion. On her return, she found the cottage as she had left it in every respect but one. The note which Gertrude had left for Lord Francis de Vipont was gone, and the poor woman drew thence the satisfactory conclusion that the young nobleman had visited the place in her absence, and had been made aware of Gertrude's danger and flight. Still, notwithstanding the quiet and undisturbed appearance of all things in the cottage, she could not conquer her terrors, and even a hearty meal and a horn-cup full of metheglin failed to reassure her, though a thousand times she repeated to herself, "They will never hurt an old woman like me."

Just about the time I have stated, however, her alarm was increased by some one lifting the latch, and pushing the door. At first she sat in mute dismay ; but the moment after the door was shaken with a strong hand, and a man's voice said, in a low tone, "Let me in, good dame ; let me in quick."

"No, indeed," answered old Martha, at length, in a loud key ; "I am a lone woman, and will open the door to no one. Go about your business, whoever you are ; and if you want anything, come before curfew another time."

"But I must and will come in to-night," said the voice. "I have something of importance to say."

"Then you must say it through the door," replied the old woman, stoutly ; "your voice will get through faster than yourself, I can tell you."

"The woman 's a fool," said the man without, impatiently ; "put down your ear to the key-hole, and I will say a word which will make you open the door speedily."

"I don't think there 's such a word in the Dutch," replied Martha; "but you may try if you like, master. My ear is at the key-hole, so speak away."

"I come from Sir William Ellerton," said the man, in a still lower tone than he had hitherto used; "now will you let me in?"

"I think your tongue is mighty like Lord Alcester's," answered Martha, still doubtful.

"Like whose?" demanded the stranger, in a tone of surprise; "what is it you are afraid of? If you have any cause to fear this lord you mention, you can soon satisfy yourself I am not he, by opening the lattice."

"That is true, too," answered Martha; and cautiously unfastening the window, she gazed out, keeping the candle within shelter of the wall, lest the wind should extinguish it.

At the same time the stranger moved forward, so that the light fell full upon him; and Martha beheld a very good-looking man, of perhaps six-and-twenty years of age, with his hair, hat, and dress dirty, as if with a long journey on horseback. His head was nearly on a level with that of the old woman, and putting his hands upon the window sill, he said in a whisper, "I must see Mrs. Gertrude directly. Go up and tell her, I have a message from her father, who has come over, and lies concealed at Southampton, ill in mind and body."

"Lack-a-day!" cried Martha, "that is unlucky."

"It is, indeed," answered the stranger; "for Heaven only knows when he will be able to move, and the messengers are looking for him everywhere."

"Ay, that is unlucky too," said Martha; "but that's not the bad luck I was talking of. Mrs. Gertrude, poor lamb, is not here. She was obliged to run away this morning, to get safe from that runaway scapegrace, Lord Alcester. But stay a minute, and I'll let you in, sir, for I see you know all about us."

"Most unfortunate, indeed," replied the other, in a tone of great consternation; "why, I was charged to bring her to Southampton with all speed. Do you know where she is?"

"Stay a bit, and I will tell you all about it," said Martha. Hennage, hastening to the door.

The stranger entered as soon as it was opened, and threw himself down upon the nearest settle, as if worn out with fatigue. "So I have posted all this way for nothing," he said; "but tell me, at all events, where your young lady is, and if it be at all within reach I will go on this very night."

"That is just what I cannot tell," replied Martha; "for I

do not know myself, nor did she know, pretty bird, when she took wing; but I'll tell you how it all happened;" and with the minute detail of age, she gave the stranger a long narrative of all that had occurred during the last two days.

He listened very attentively, called Lord Alcester's conduct infamous, declared that if it were not for betraying the whole secret, he would go up to his house and bring him instantly to account, and in the end said, in a gloomy tone, "Of course, she took all her father's and mother's letters with her, which is more unfortunate than all; for I was directed by poor Sir William to see that they were burnt instantly before we set out for Southampton. He fears that if they were found, much mischief might ensue. But perhaps she has burned them already?"

"No, that she has not," replied the old nurse; "they have been her only comfort, poor thing; and many's the hour that she would pore over them. She kept them like the apple of her eye."

"It is a most dangerous habit, in these terrible times, to keep any letters at all," answered the stranger; "but it cannot be helped now. All I trust is, that they may not be found upon her; for it might lead to her death, and yours too, my good woman, if it were discovered that you were a party to her receiving them. These are dark days, indeed."

"Alas, that they are!" replied Martha; "but as to their being found upon her, there's no chance of that; for she was in such a hurry, she did not think to take them; and I will burn them all this very night, as it is Sir William's order. They are all up stairs in the window seat chest."

"Burn them directly," cried the stranger, eagerly; "they cannot be destroyed too soon. Bring them down at once, and we will consume them one by one. It may save both her and yourself from destruction."

"How lucky that this bad lordling did not search the house and find them," rejoined Martha, moving towards the foot of the staircase.

"You would have been in gaol by this time, if he had," replied the stranger, and the old woman hurried her pace considerably at the intimation. Some doubts as to whether she was doing right, seized her when she had got the letters out of the large chest, which formed a sort of scat in the window of the up-stairs room; but she had heard of many persons having suffered death in consequence of words written in letters imprudently preserved, and apprehension overcame all scruples. She carried the letters, some eight or ten in number, down to the room below, and found the stranger carefully locking the door and shutting the casement.

"Now, dame," he cried, "let us destroy them all at once. Have you fire in that room behind?"

"No, sir, but I'll make some in a minute," replied the old woman.

"Quick, then," said the stranger; "I will tear them into small pieces in the meantime," and he took the bundle from her hand.

Martha opened the kitchen-door; but then a bright thought struck her; and she turned round, saying, "Why, I need not make a fire. We can put them down on the hearth, and set a light to them with the candle."

"True, true," replied the other, readily; "there they are. I will see it done before I go;" and he gave her the letters back again. But one had already been abstracted from the number.

The old woman carried them carefully to the kitchen fireplace, and laid them in a heap on the hearth, then lighted one at the candle and threw it amongst the rest. The dry paper caught readily, the flame flew from sheet to sheet, one after the other the stored testimonies of parental love were consumed; and when Martha turned round, she saw the stranger gazing at the fading embers with a smile. She did not half like his look; but as soon as all was done, he bade her good-night somewhat abruptly, and quitted the cottage.

"It is strange," thought the old woman, "that he did not ask more about the man with his blackamoors, and about Lord Francis;" but it was too late then to think of all that was suspicious in his demeanor, and locking the door after him, she retired to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

To the prosperous and the light-hearted; to those who feed upon the luscious fruits of earth, almost everything that is new is pleasant; for enjoyment is too sweet not to pall soon upon the taste, and change of object must be had to give it zest. Those who know not misfortune, too, have no terror at change; for though nature inspires us with hope as the companion of desire, it is only experience that teaches fear. To the unfortunate, and those well acquainted with adversity; to the drinkers of the bitter waters, every change has its apprehension or its pang. We grow accustomed to our lot, whatever it is, and learn to bear it; but when the actual state must be given up for another, experienced in sorrows, we see in the new condition but some fresh cause for dread.

With Gertrude Ellerton, the first effect of novelty had passed away when I shall again bring her before my reader's

eyes, and she had become reconciled to her new abode and its other inhabitants.

About eighteen hours had gone by since we left her at the little solitary inn amongst the hills; and now she was the tenant of a small house of two stories, in the nearest hamlet, or rather, I should have said, at the end of the nearest hamlet, for it was detached from the other cottages by a garden and a field. The other inhabitants of the same building were the sister of the landlord of the inn, and a servant girl, of about fourteen years of age. The mistress counted just three times that number of years, and was still a maiden. Her features were rough and harsh, her form ungainly; and love, so often caught by the eye, had never fluttered round her; nor had Hymen ever prepared his altar for her worship, although she possessed some of those attractions of purse which often supply charms where nature has denied them. She was well to do for her station; but yet had never heard the words but rarely unpleasant to female ears. Nevertheless she was not the least soured by this neglect. Nature, as not unfrequently happens, had compensated for a rude form, by a gentle heart, a kindly disposition, and a fine understanding. Her voice, too, was very sweet; and though she was quick and somewhat rough in manner, yet that soft voice seemed to be given as the exponent of the qualities within, and few persons ever fancied long that Betty Wellstead was a harsh or unkind person.

Gertrude understood her speedily, and though the good lady herself at first marvelled a little at her guest's situation, and said to herself, "She is a great deal too pretty to go about the country with men," she had soon formed an estimate of her character, if not of her circumstances, which was not very wide of the truth. She asked no questions—she was not in the least troublesome—although from time to time she would come in to see if the young lady wanted anything, and would gaze at her, with a look of tender compassion on her harsh features, like an angel looking through a mask.

Gertrude, as I have said, comprehended her character readily, and was very well pleased to be the inmate of her house; but still she thought it better, in the circumstances which surrounded her, to be as much alone as possible; and she remained in her own chamber the whole day, except once when she came down to speak to John Wellstead of the inn, for the purpose of sending intimation to her old nurse of her safety and her abode, and of fulfilling her word to Francis de Vipont, who, she knew, would be anxious and alarmed till

he heard. The worthy landlord undertook, without any difficulty, to send an intimation to dame Hennage that she would receive certain intelligence which she wished for, if she would apply at his house; and, at the same time, he charged himself with a brief note to Lord Francis, which he promised to deliver secretly.

Some four hours had elapsed after his departure, and night had succeeded to day, when, as Gertrude was seated alone in her own chamber, reading a book which had been lent her by the mistress of the house, Betty Wellstead herself appeared, with a slow step and a thoughtful look.

"There is a man below," she said, "who desires to speak with the young lady lodging at my house. Now it must be you, he means, my dear; for the girl, though young, is not a lady: I am neither young nor a lady; but you are both, that is clear enough, notwithstanding the red bodice and grey petticoat."

"He cannot want me," answered Gertrude in alarm; "what is he like?"

"He is an elderly man, like a servant, though he wears no lord's colours," answered the other. "He is a quiet, respectable-looking man; and I almost fancy he must come from the castle."

"What shall I do?" murmured Gertrude, speaking to herself. "Ask him, my good woman, who sent him. I can see no one, unless I know whence they come, and what they seek."

"He would not tell his business," answered Betty Wellstead; "but perhaps he will be more communicative when he finds he cannot see you without speaking out." Thus saying, she left the room, and was absent several minutes; when she returned, however, her face wore a better-satisfied look: "He tells me, lady," she said, "that he comes last from some one whom he calls Goody Hennage; but that he is sent by your father, from whom he has a letter for you."

"Indeed!" said Gertrude, with a look of surprise and pleasure; "then I must see him directly."

"That is right!—that is right!" said the good woman; "I almost fancied, poor thing! that you might not like to hear from home. But I will send him up to you in a minute."

While she was gone, Gertrude watched the door eagerly, hearing a slow step mounting the stairs; but when her visitor entered, after knocking for permission, his face was perfectly strange to her. He was, however, as he had been described, a calm, sedate-looking, well-mannered, elderly man, respect-

ably but not richly clothed; and he approached Gertrude with an air of deference, which clearly showed he knew whom he was addressing.

"Miss Gertrude Ellerton?" he said, after closing the door behind him; "I cannot be mistaken, for you are so like my lady."

"The same," answered Gertrude, eagerly. "You have a letter from my father, they tell me?"

"Yes, madam, I have," he answered, feeling in one of his large pockets. "I have had great difficulty in finding you, and have been too long about it, I fear; but I trust you will find Sir William no worse."

"Worse! Is he ill, then?" cried Gertrude, her cheek turning pale.

"Very ill, lady, when I left him," replied the man, producing a letter wrapped up in a piece of leather. "He will wonder what is become of me; for I have now been nearly two days away, though the distance is but twenty miles; but dame Hennage could tell me nothing about you yesterday, only that——"

But Gertrude did not hear the conclusion of the sentence; for she had taken the letter from his hand, had torn it open, and was reading it attentively.

"Dear daughter," so the letter went; "I have come thus far to see you, and probably to take you with me to a distant land; but fatigue and grief have done their work with me, and I can go no further. I am sick in this small inn, and send these lines by one whom you can fully trust. Come to me, my dear child. I think the sight of your sweet face will cure me of this ailment: but whether it do or not, I must see you and hold you to my heart once more.

"Your loving father,

"WILLIAM ELLERTON."

Then came a postscript to the following effect: "Make no delay, my child, as you love me. Beacher, who bears this, will get a carriage of some kind for you, if he can find one in the country; if not, come on horseback. You used to ride well once, my Gertrude."

Gertrude put her hand to her eyes and wiped away some tears. "I trust he is not very ill," she said; "his handwriting is strong and clear."

"It cost him long to write it, madam," said the servant; "you may see he took pains."

"Yes, I see," she answered; "the letters are not so bold and free as they used to be. I must go directly. Where can we find horses, I wonder?"

"Why, madam, I got a coach at Illington, as I came along from Malwood," the man replied; "for I felt sure you would come as soon as you heard. It is down in the village below; for I had trouble to find the house, and had to seek the way on foot."

"Then get it to the door," said Gertrude; "by that time I shall be ready."

The man bowed low, and retired; and at the end of about five minutes, while she was explaining to the good landlady the necessity of her immediate departure, the grating sound of the heavy wheels of those days was heard before the house.

"Go, my dear, go at once!" said Betty Wellstead; "but tell me whither you are going, that I may let those know who care for you."

"I did not remark the name of the place," said Gertrude; and drawing the letter from her bosom, she looked at the date. "Amblecombe," she said; "yes, it is Amblecombe. Where is that?—I do not know it."

"It is about eighteen miles hence," said Betty Wellstead. "Amblecombe!—you say your father is lying ill at an inn? I did not know there was one there. Are you sure of the handwriting?"

"Oh, yes, quite," answered Gertrude. "The letters are rather stiff, but he was ill when he wrote, and the letters are all formed as he forms them. The E, I could vouch for anywhere."

As she spoke the servant entered the house again, with his slow quiet step, and took from Gertrude's hand the little packet she had made up of things the most needful. But Betty Wellstead did not yet seem satisfied, and turning to the man, she asked, "Is there an inn at Amblecombe?—I never heard of one."

"Oh, yes, there is, my good woman," he answered somewhat sharply. "Now, madam, the carriage is here, and I fear we shall be late, for it is already past eight, and the roads are very heavy."

"I am ready," answered Gertrude; and bidding farewell to her kind-hearted entertainer, she passed through the little garden to the public road. A large heavy coach was standing close to the garden-gate, with a small seat in front, only big enough for the driver. The servant placed her in the carriage, and then, with many apologies for coming into the same vehicle with herself, took his seat opposite to her, saying that he would get a horse at the first town through which they passed.

"That is quite unnecessary," answered Gertrude; "tell

me how all this has happened. I wish much to hear more about my father. It was but the day before yesterday that I heard, by accident, of his arrival in England."

"Then his last letter must have miscarried," said the man, "for I know he wrote;" and he proceeded to give a long and minute account of a stormy and tedious passage from the town of St. Malo to the Southampton Water. He said, that crew and passengers, for two whole nights, had remained upon the deck in peril every moment of sinking in the ship; and when they at length reached the port every man was so completely exhausted as hardly to be able to stand. Sir William Ellerton, he continued, was somewhat unwell when he quitted France, and fatigue had rendered him so much worse that he would certainly have paused to take several days' repose at Southampton had it not most unfortunately happened that, in going from the port to a small inn where he intended to lie concealed he met a gentleman from London, whom he believed to be his enemy, and who seemed to see and recognise him. Nothing remained but to proceed at once; and horses were procured, with which Sir William Ellerton attempted to cross the country to see his daughter, but became worse as he proceeded, till at length, on arriving at Amblecombe, he was forced to abandon the attempt and take to his bed.

Every circumstance was so probable, and so naturally told, that if good Mistress Wellstead's momentary doubts had created a suspicion in Gertrude's mind, it would have vanished as soon as she heard the man's narrative. Terror and grief she certainly felt at the account of her father's state; but she thanked God that she was so near to tend and comfort him. In the darkness of the night she could weep unobserved, and from time to time she broke the silence (which the servant maintained respectfully after he had finished his history) to ask questions regarding all that had befallen her father and her mother since she had seen them. To some of these she received satisfactory answers; but as to other events the man frankly replied that he could give no information, as he had only entered the service of Sir William a year before, and had, during that time, been twice to England on business of importance.

Expectation ever makes the way seem long; and in Gertrude's case, deep anxiety, darkness, and heavy, ill-made roads, might well add to the tediousness of the journey. She was somewhat surprised, then, when at the end of not more than two hours the carriage stopped before a house at the road-side, and the man said, "We have arrived, madam."

The moon was just rising over the low ground with a thin film of clouds across her disk; but the light was sufficient to

show Gertrude that the house stood detached from all others, though at some distance there appeared to be a small town.

"Is this Amblecombe, then?" she asked; "I thought you said it was eighteen or twenty miles distant; and we cannot have come so far in this time."

"It is twenty miles from Malwood, madam," said the man, "but a good deal nearer the Oak Tree Inn, where I obtained tidings of you, and the man, I suppose, has taken the shortest cut. But this is Amblecombe; and that room where you see a light burning in the window is where Sir William is. Let me assist you to alight; this step is very bad. Take care of that rut, madam. This way, if you please. These people shut their doors early; but I think it is later than you suppose. I had better go up first and just break to my master that you are here. Perhaps he may be sleeping."

"My foot will not wake him," said Gertrude; "I will go up at once."

"As you please, madam," said the servant; "but I think any surprise might do harm. He is very weak, and I have been so much longer than he expected."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said the young lady; "but do not be long."

"Not five minutes," said the servant, entering the house and taking a lamp from a man in a white night-cap and apron. "This way, madam: there is a room vacant here," and he led the way along a narrow passage to a door upon the left. It opened into a small chamber, with a table and a few chairs, and the servant, after setting down the lamp, drew forward a seat and retired, closing the door behind him.

Gertrude remained standing by the table with her heart beating; but her attention was soon drawn towards the neighbouring room by the sounds of many voices speaking in loud and noisy tones within.

"Alas! that my father should be exposed to such noise and disturbance in his sickness!" she thought. "Sleep!—how can he sleep with such sounds going on under his very chamber? I wonder if no quiet cottage could be found near, to which he could be removed without injury."

Some of the tongues grew louder as she thus meditated, and she heard one voice say distinctly, "No, my lord, that cannot be. Lord William, I know, will never consent to it; and therefore there is no use of proposing it."

"But Sir John! Sir John!" said another tongue; and then the voices dropped into a lower tone, and Gertrude heard nothing more distinctly.

"This servant is long," she thought; "can my father be worse? Good Heaven! can he be dead?" and she sprang.

towards the door ; but as she was about to open it, there was a sound of numerous feet walking along the passage, as if the party in the next room were just separating, and she paused to let them pass out. They went slowly, talking as they went, and two or three stopped apparently at the house door to hold further conversation. At length, however, all was still, save a noise of horses' feet, which grew fainter each moment.

"There is something strange in all this," thought Gertrude ; and she might have meditated longer on the subject, but her mind was too busy with her father's state to be easily withdrawn from that theme ; and lifting the latch, she tried to open the door.

It was locked, and she found herself a prisoner. The poor girl's heart beat as if it would have burst the lacings of her bodice ; but after a moment she strove to recover courage and presence of mind. "Perhaps he may have fastened it to prevent any of those strangers from intruding," she said ; but still the thought recurred,—could she have been deceived ? Was it possible that Lord Alcester, frustrated in his first attempt, had now had recourse to a base artifice to entrap her ? "But no," she answered immediately, "the letter was in my father's own hand."

No one, she thought, and certainly not Lord Alcester, was sufficiently well acquainted with his writing to imitate it so exactly. She must be frightening herself without cause. The door was either locked to keep the strangers out, or some one of them had turned the key in idleness as he passed. But then she took the letter from her bosom again, and held it to the lamp, and as she did so she trembled. Defects appeared which she had not previously remarked ; the imitation was very good but it was not perfect ; the want of freedom in the hand struck her more and more ; and gradually the conviction forced itself upon her that she had been cheated by a forgery. What should she do ?—How could she act ? Flight was impossible :—there was no other door in the room but the one by which she had entered. She looked at the window, and it was barred with iron from the top to the bottom.

Still no one came ; and as she sat and wept one source of consolation rose up for her in the midst of her sorrow : "At least," she thought, "my heart is relieved of fears for my father. If the letter is a forgery,—and that it is too surely,—the tale of his sickness is a falsehood. They dare not surely, ill use me ; but at all events I will give them no encouragement to do so by showing this weakness. I will assume courage, if I have it not ; but, I shall have it, too, in

the moment of need. God will give it to me ; and in His mercy and strength I will trust."

She wiped the tears from her eyes and listened ; for she thought she heard steps, but they came not near the door ; and then saying to herself, " Perhaps I can make some of the people of the house hear. They surely cannot all be in league with this base young man. They will fear the law he so daringly violates—at least some of them will ; and if there be but one on my side, that is some protection." Thus thinking, she approached the door again, and shook it violently, calling aloud, " Unlock the door ! How dare any one keep me here ? "

" Be still ! be still ! " said a voice from the outside, speaking in a low tone ; " there are persons in the house who must not know of your being here. You will be the cause of your own and your father's ruin. "

" I am not to be deceived any more, " said Gertrude aloud. " Open the door directly, or I will alarm the whole house. If it be as you say, open the door and give me the key ; I will not be detained in a locked room against my will. In one minute more I will shriek till every one in the house hears me ! "

" Shriek, then, foolish girl, and ruin yourself and others, " said the voice ; and the next moment she heard steps walking away. There was something in the tone and manner which showed her clearly that her fears were not groundless, and without hesitation she raised her voice and cried for help ; but as she did so, some one without began to sing aloud ; and another tongue joined in with peals of laughter and loud oaths. If any persons heard her cries, they came not to her deliverance ; and, at length, exhausted with terror and exertion, she sat down and wept once more. A few moments after she again heard the sound of horses' feet ; but these, as before, seemed to be quitting the house, not approaching it ; and then there was a silence of several minutes. Then a foot-step in a different part of the house, apparently almost overhead, was heard, and thinking that the struggle was coming, Gertrude dried her eyes again, and tried to nerve her heart ; but she was destined to remain still longer in suspense for the steps ceased, and all remained quite quiet for half an hour. She was weary and exhausted, but yet she watched without a drooping eyelid or a drowsy ear, till at length voices whispering near the door of the room caught her attention, and she listened eagerly. " No, no, " said one ; " wait at the end of the passage, and put two men between you and the stairs. Do not come till I call ; but have everything ready. " The latch of the door moved slightly, and Gertrude gazed

forward, seated by the table; but the speaker without remained for a moment or two to add a few words more; and then the key was turned in the lock. The door opened slowly, and the poor girl expected to behold the face of Lord Alcester. That sight would have been a relief, when Sir Frederick Beltingham stood before her.

CHAPTER XV.

As the storm beats down the flower and but refreshes the forest tree, so grief which overwhelms the weak and unstable mind, gives additional strength and power to the vigorous and the firm. The lady Emmeline de Vipont had known a period of deep affliction. She had seen the man she loved accused unjustly, driven from love and home and his native land to perish in the waves; and she had wept and mourned as few have power to weep and mourn; for hers was a heart of strong affections, and she would neither joy nor grieve feebly. Nevertheless, her sorrow served not to enervate. On the contrary, it strengthened, by breaking one tie between her and earthly things. Her loss was as a shield between her and all the other darts of Fate; for sometimes great grief, like the waves of Styx, by one dark plunge, renders invulnerable. She acquired a calm firmness which was very powerful upon others; and even her own father, resolute and cold as he appeared to be, felt the impression of her character, and yielded more to her than to any other human being; yet she lost nothing of her gentleness and kindness; there was nought stern, or harsh, or repulsive in manner, look, word, feeling. It was but that she was firm, and all who approached her felt it, notwithstanding her tender sweetness of demeanor. Perhaps it was that the firmness of which I speak, displayed its only ordinary indication in her perfect command over herself—her unhesitating decision of conduct. Each word, each movement, each act, was uttered or performed without a doubt: and those who have power over themselves have always more or less power over others.

Emmeline sat calmly and quietly in her room for about half an hour after her brother had left her. The information which he had given her regarding her father's design of marrying her to Lord Alcester, did not seem to interrupt her avocations for a moment. Her determination had been taken instantly—her whole conduct fixed. The matter was in fact settled, and she instantly dismissed the subject from her mind. She wrote for some time, and read for some time, and then walked quietly into a small room, which we in the present day would call her boudoir, in which some plants then rare had been

collected. She had not been there five minutes when one of the servants came up from below, and informed her that Lord Alcester desired admission. The announcement created no agitation, but she calmly awaited his coming without the slightest variation of colour, or any sign of emotion whatsoever: and when he had entered gave him her hand as her cousin, begging him to be seated.

There was something in her self-possession, and her calm indifferent manner, which somewhat puzzled and awed Lord Alcester. He had imagined, from what the Earl had said, that Lady Emmeline was already warned of the arrangements proposed; and, although it must be confessed that he had hitherto only thought of her as a very charming and piquante girl,—to use unwillingly a French term,—without ever dreaming of wedding her, yet the wealth which was to be her portion was too great an object to be neglected by a man whose patrimonial property was too small for his ambition, and upon whom the trammels of matrimony were not likely to sit very heavily. He had come there intending to make himself as agreeable to Emmeline as possible; but he had certainly expected to find her prepared for his addresses in some degree. No blush, no trembling lip, no averted eye, gave any sign of consciousness on her part; and after a few words of commonplace conversation, he ventured to approach the subject by saying, "I had hoped, Emmeline, that the Earl had saved me part of a task which I am sure I shall execute ill, and informed you of his kind intentions on my behalf. But I fear, from what I see, that you have been left in ignorance thereof, and that I must plead my cause myself."

"My father has said nothing to me, Alcester," replied Lady Emmeline; "but his wishes have reached my ears from other sources; and I am only sorry that he has ever entertained a project which you must feel yourself is quite impossible."

"But why impossible, dear Emmeline?" said her cousin; "at least give me some reason for so imperative a denial."

"In the first place," replied Emmeline, "because I cannot love you as a wife should love her husband. I shall never love again, Alcester, and I will never marry without love. Had not the unfortunate breach between your father and his, and your education on the Continent, prevented you from knowing your cousin intimately, you would understand the feelings which must ever attach me to his memory. But there is another reason. Not only I cannot love you, but you cannot love me; because you love, or ought to love, another."

"Nay, nay, talk not of idle ties which every young man casts in the giddy days of youth," replied Lord Alcester.

"If you will but promise, Emmeline, to reconsider this matter, I will break those ties in a moment, and love you as devotedly as you could desire."

"If you did break them, I should abhor you," answered Emmeline, warmly. "What! do you suppose, Lord Alcester, that any woman of heart, or soul, or mind; any woman worthy of an honest man's love, could know that another had sacrificed everything for you,—rank, station, society, friends, relations, honour itself—and that you had cast her away like a faded flower, and would still consent to give you her hand? O, no! believe me, such can never be my case. Hate would be too poor a name for the feelings which such conduct would inspire in me."

Lord Alcester was silent for several moments, and the burning blood came up into his cheek.

"You do not know, you do not understand the things you speak of," he answered, at length.

"I must speak of things, Alcester," she said, in a softer tone, "which I would willingly forbear, and which, were you not my cousin, I would not touch upon. Even now they make my cheek burn, but I cannot neglect this opportunity of trying to awaken you to a sense of right; and in so doing I will speak of nothing that I do not understand.—I have stood beside Henrietta Compton in many a gay company, and am no bad judge of what a woman's conduct ought to be, and I take upon myself to say, that nought but deceit and treachery could have made her swerve from the course of right. The story goes, and you yourself must know if it be true, that you induced her to quit her home by the promise of immediate marriage; that you taught her to believe that it was the only object which you had in view; that her mother's personal objection to yourself was the only obstacle between you. Now I ask you, Alcester, have you kept your promise? Have you kept any promise that you ever made her? How can you expect any other woman to believe you, if this is so? You pledged your honour, have you redeemed it?—if not, your honour is gone."

"You are too harsh, Emmeline; you are too harsh," he said, with a downcast and doubtful look; "you surely would not have me go home and marry my mistress?"

"Why not?" demanded Emmeline, eagerly. "How was she made your mistress? that is the question. Did she seek you? did she promise and vow? did she kneel at your feet? did she swear to be faithful and constant to you for ever, if you would but listen to her?—Fie! fie upon it! Such a pretext is vain. Why not? I say again. Has she broken her

vows to you? has she forgotten any promise? has she courted and flattered others? has she been false, and perjured, and dishonest? if not, with whom lies the shame?"

"But the disgrace of such a transaction," said Lord Alcester; "to have my wife pointed at as the fallen woman I had married!"

"Oh, forbear, forbear!" cried Emmeline; "lose yourself not for ever in my good opinion: Ask yourself, Alcester, when you talk of the disgrace, is it just that she should bear the shame of your fault? that, when you are the real criminal, she should be the entire sufferer? that you should make the violation of your promise the excuse for never fulfilling it? There could be but one plausible motive for doing so.—Can you put your hand upon your heart and say she does not love you? can you accuse her of having wronged you in any shape?"

"No, I cannot," answered Lord Alcester, in a low but solemn tone. "She does love me. She is incapable of wronging me."

"Then one more question, Alcester, and if you answer Yea, even the vain excuse of the world's opinion will be gone," continued Emmeline.—"Did you, or did you not—for I have heard so—write her a letter in which you called her wife? Did you tell her to consider herself as such from the moment she quitted her mother's house? Did you promise her to lead her instantly to the altar, and did she act upon that assurance?—You do not answer, but you cannot deny it; and I tell you that letter is a contract. I heard, not a year ago, one of the ecclesiastical judges, when the subject was mentioned, declare, that such was the case, and that your marriage with any other would be invalid. Oh, Alcester, the honourable course is open for you, if you will take it. Go home, acknowledge your marriage as of two years' date, and ratify it by the service of the Church. Thus shall you take away her shame and recover your own honour, which is sadly wounded."

"I will think of it, I will think of it," said Lord Alcester, turning away.

"Ay, think," said Emmeline, in a sad tone, "but think rightly, Alcester; for those who think long before they do what is just, sometimes do it not at all."

Lord Alcester made no reply, but quitted the room, and in a few minutes after Emmeline saw him riding fast away from the house. At the same time, however, she heard her father's foot approaching, and though it cannot be said she feared, yet she felt pained at the thought of the coming discussion. The next moment the Earl entered the room, with a gloomy brow

and lips compressed. There was nothing like haste or impetuosity in his manner, but Emmeline knew him well, and was aware that his anger was not the less violent when it seemed most calm.

"How is this, Lady Emmeline?" he said, approaching the table. "Lord Alcester, in a few words of scanty information, tells me that you have rejected the hand of one whom I thought fit to select for your future husband."

"The hand of Lord Alcester, my dear father," replied Emmeline, "I certainly did reject in the most positive and distinct manner, so as to leave him, I trust, no expectation of ever obtaining mine."

"And this with the knowledge that it was my wish and command that you should accept him!" said the Earl, frowning upon her till his eyebrows almost met; "such conduct I might have expected from your brother, but not from you."

"I regretted much to find that it was your wish, my father," answered Emmeline; "but as I felt sure that your only object must be to promote my happiness, and to have yielded would have destroyed it, I hesitated not to say, No."

"You are mistaken," said the Earl, sternly; "my only object was not your happiness. For reasons which it is unnecessary to explain, I judge that this marriage is requisite and proper; that the interests of your family and house require it; and if you did not know before that it was my command, you know it now."

"Your commands I would obey, my dear father," answered Emmeline, in a calm and gentle tone, "wherever a mere sacrifice of my own happiness, comfort, or pleasure was concerned. In all such things I would bow my will to yours. But there are cases where it is not a matter of mere will, where it is not my happiness but my duty that is at stake, and there, my lord, I do not yield. That I could not be happy with Lord Alcester were nothing. I might try to make a happiness where I did not find it; but I will not vow to love a man I cannot love; for to do so were to insult God, whose name I take in vain. That it would be with agony of heart that I married any one, might be little worth consideration, when to obey you were the question; but to marry one whom I believe to be the husband of another, involves the breach of a higher duty than even that of a child to a parent; and I will not do it."

"Weak girl!" said the Earl; "do you pretend to look upon an idle amour with——"

But he was interrupted in full course towards an argument much like that which Lord Alcester had used before, by a

servant coming in in haste, and saying, "My lord, there are two noble gentlemen just arrived, who request to speak with you immediately, as they must go forward, they say, to London to-night."

"Did they give no names?" asked the Earl.

"They did not, my lord," answered the servant; "but I know them both by sight. The one is the Lord Russell, the other Colonel Algernon Sydney."

"I come, I come directly," said the Earl; "take them to the book-room. Emmeline, we must speak more hereafter."

"On this subject, my dear father, it were painful and fruitless," answered Emmeline; "but be it as you please, I will yield anything to your commands, but my sense of right."

"A sense most pleasant to your own good will," said the Earl, with a sneer, and left her.

Time wore on, and in about an hour Emmeline was summoned to preside at her father's supper-table, for dinner had passed long before. It struck her that the hour was rather early for the meal; but the first words which she heard on entering the large library, where the party of three were assembled, showed her that a change of time had been made by her father's order.

"If it must be so, my lord," said the Earl, addressing the gentleman on his right, "we will now to supper, for here is my daughter. But I would yet fain hope that you and your gallant friend might be persuaded to stay the night."

The gentleman whom he spoke to declined courteously, alleging that were he not to ride fifteen miles that night, it would be impossible for him to reach London on the following day, and then turned to greet the Lady Emmeline, whom he had often met before. He was a man still in the prime of life, though not exactly young, well formed in limbs, and with a countenance full of gentle dignity. To gaze upon it in its quiet moments, none would have thought that there was the popular orator, the firm unshrinking advocate of the people's rights, the stern and daring reprover of misused authority. The expression was thoughtful, calm, and serious; but neither grave nor harsh. It was impossible to look upon that face without being prepossessed with an assurance of the deep sincerity and truth of William Lord Russell; and, though not exactly handsome, there was something so engaging in it, too, that one can easily conceive from the portraits which remain, the qualities which won such deep and devoted attachment from his friends, and which left many a public opponent, but no personal enemy.

The other gentleman, so well known in history—the ever-famous Algernon Sydney—needs no description here; but

yet the expression of his countenance, it may be said, was very different from that of his friend and companion. It was less thoughtful, but more quick and vehement. There was a sharp and flashing turn of the eye when anything was said which suddenly attracted his attention, that seemed to bespeak an eager, almost a rash spirit; and at this time there was an habitual frown—a sort of indentation between the eyebrows—which might show that there was mortification and disappointment in the records of his life. At times, too, when he listened attentively—which, by the way, he seldom did, for he thought little of other men's opinions—he would partly close his eyes, and seemed to have a power of drawing them nearer together; but then the expression was aught but pleasant, and gave an idea of cunning as well as daring, though we do not find that such an impression could be borne out by any part of his history. The finely-cut face was less dignified than that of Lord Russell, but more keen and vehement; sterner, but not so thoughtful.

As the doors to the eating-hall were thrown open, Lord Russell led the lady in, inquiring in a low tone as they went, while the Earl and Algernon Sydney followed,—“Is your brother not here, dear lady? I hope there is no new disagreement between himself and the good Earl, your father?”

“None, that I know of,” answered Emmeline, very gravely. “You are aware, my lord, that there are subjects on which he differs greatly from my father, and his confidence in the justness of his own views has not been shaken by anything that has occurred since the sad period when those differences arose.”

“I am aware that such is the case,” answered her companion; “in one respect, believe me, your brother was wrong. I, who had the best means of knowing, assure you that a plot really existed, and of a very serious character; but in another respect your brother was right, the base men to whose lot it fell to discover that great treason, finding it a profitable speculation, used it for the darkest purposes, and murdered, for such is the proper term, more than one innocent man, ruining many others—among the rest poor Sir William Ellerton.”

As he uttered the last words, they were seating themselves at table, and the Earl was already at the other end; but, nevertheless, Emmeline ventured to say, “Could not his fate have been warded off, my lord?”

“Had he stayed, perhaps it might have been done,” replied the nobleman, “and I would have done all to effect it, for he was my very good friend; but even then I could not have answered for the result. Popular fury is a terrible thing.”

Lady Emmeline," he added aloud, "and nought but firm conviction of right and necessity can justify any man in attempting to rouse or to direct it."

"It is the scourge of God for the punishment of tyrants," said Sydney, who had heard the last words, "and if it were oftener wielded by the Almighty hand, we should have more blessings and fewer curses upon earth. But curses are permitted for good cause, doubtless. I have often been amused," he continued, in a quivering strain, "by the account given in the Bible of the children of Israel choosing themselves a king. It was so evidently a wickedness and an offence, that I wonder nations have not taken the lesson to heart, and done without the dynasty as superfluous. The punishment was almost as prompt as the sin, too, from the beginning, except David, I think they had hardly one who was really a good man, and most of them were guilty of causing Israel to sin. I feel it was not only when men were bent upon raising one of themselves to bow down and worship him, that he should set up things of wood and stone for the same purpose."

"Nevertheless," Sydney, there have been good men in the world, who were as competent as any of their masters, was Lord Russell's answer.

"Nations, like armies, must have leaders in the time of war or of difficulty," replied Sydney after some reflection had been tasted, "but you will allow me to say much as men generally assert, that great kings have been created by troublous events, but that difficult time have created or called forth the good qualities of a monarch, and that he has restrained his bad ones, and thus saved the people from ruin of his people."

"I do not see what you would infer," said the Lord of Virepont.

"That the power entrusted to a leader for the accomplishment of good should cease when the object is attained," answered Sydney.

"Metinks the object is never wholly attained," replied Lord Russell; "for there are still the difficulties of government when the difficulties of command have ceased, and I do believe that constitution is best which provides due checks against abuse of power, and yet leaves it in the same hands and the same course of action, so long as it is not abused."

"Fatal error!" cried Sydney; "what check can ever be provided sufficient for the purpose? I know you would speak of what I must term the right of resistance, but is that a solution? The right of resistance is never perma-

nently successful; it is not even temporarily successful, except against the weak despot, never against the vigorous tyrant. Intrusting power to one man, you trust a power to corrupt as well as to rule; and the scaffold and the dungeon cry out upon the inutility of the boasted check upon delegated power."

"The voice from the scaffold and the dungeon will be heard hereafter," answered Russell; "and will teach men to make the check efficacious. The amelioration of all things is slow, most so of all institutions. The mind of man does not advance by leaps, but by the slow steps of experience. Each generation has its task to accomplish, and it is sufficient if it leaves its lesson and its warning to the future. If we cannot save our country for ourselves, we can do something to save it for our children, and they must take their share in the great work of perfecting that which we leave incomplete. You will be surprised that I should say it, but to my judgment tyranny itself is better than anarchy."

"Anarchy lasts but a season," answered Sydney, "tyranny is perennial. It is the Upas tree which lives for centuries, spreading death over all that comes beneath its branches. I would rather die a thousand deaths than live one year a slave."

The Earl of Virepont, during the whole of this conversation, had suffered under visible uneasiness. I have given it without interruption, for both Lord Russell and his friend were so eager, that, whatever indifferent subject was interposed, they spoke and replied as if the conversation on the topic of government had been continuous; but their host frequently looked round to the numerous servants who were in the room, gave orders in a louder tone, and more minutely, than was altogether according to the usages of society, and pressed his guests to food and wine as if he would fain have engaged them upon things less speculative than those they were discussing. But it was in vain he did so, till at length he reminded them, in French, that there were too many ears around for dangerous subjects to be treated of in safety. Russell smiled and replied in the same language; "Sydney," he said, "is fond of displaying his opinions, I content myself with not concealing mine. He thinks, perhaps, to make converts; I believe that the love of liberty is innate in those men who possess it, but that the willing slave will never be taught to appreciate freedom."

"I think it as well," said the Earl, still using the French tongue, "to be silent regarding one's opinions till there be a just cause for expressing them; but more especially to conceal them before people of inferior station and education."

who are apt, from idleness or malevolence, to repeat what they hear, of which they seldom accurately recollect one-half or understand one-third. Our conversation to-night must have sounded to the ears of the men around us very like nonsense, but nonsense of a kind out of which a spy or an informer might pick sufficient treason to put our lives or properties in danger."

"If such be the case in England, my good lord," replied Sydney, "our laws require a change, as well as our institutions. If a party of gentlemen cannot discuss the abstract principles of government, detached from all particular application, without risk of the cord or the axe, it would be better to live in Turkey, where a man is only strangled for having too much money, and never for having too much wit."

The supper soon after came to an end, and Emmeline retired to her own chamber. The three gentlemen, however, remained at table; and as soon as the servants had disappeared, the Earl himself brought back the conversation to the subject from which he had diverted it. "We are, indeed," he said, "living in perilous times; but it requires, my good friends, to be prudent, as well as energetic, and to be enabled to show that there is good cause for resistance, before we make the slightest attempt."

"I do not know what you may consider good cause, my lord," said Sydney, "but there have been acts done, far less than which have brought a king's head to the scaffold. What is the avowed intention to rule without Parliaments, but a breach of that contract between the Sovereign and the people, on which alone rests his title to the throne? What is the extorting of all the charters from our corporate bodies and cities, but an atrocious attempt to corrupt our representation, and stifle the voice of freedom and of justice? What is this meddling with this election of the sheriffs of London, but a gross violation of the privileges of the city? Let me add, that the charters of our corporate towns are so many seals to Magna Charta, and that municipal institutions are the surer guarantees of general freedom. If these acts which I have mentioned do not afford cause for resistance, I know not what does. Step by step our liberties have been taken from us; and when a monarch denies his people the means of tendering moral resistance in the senate, he throws them back, as their only resource, upon physical force."

"The right of resistance," said Lord Russell, "would be a perfect check, if it were not embarrassed with one difficulty. When does it come into activity? That is the question. I should be sorry to say that every arbitrary, or even every

tyrannical act, on the part of a monarch or his ministers, would justify any body of men in taking arms against him. You cannot fix him down so rigidly; the law itself cannot be so clearly defined, as not to leave him many powers which, without a violation of the constitution, may be turned to tyrannical uses. If men were justified in levying war on all such occasions, there would be no peace in the land, and each man's private judgment would be a tribunal for the trial of the monarch's actions. In short, it seems to me that the right of resistance does not come into operation till the great majority of the people are convinced that there is no safety for their liberty but in a recourse to arms."

"In one word, my noble friend," said Sydney, "resistance is only justifiable when it is sure to be successful?"

"Not exactly so," answered Lord William Russell, gravely. "In calculating the probabilities of success, there are many other elements to be taken into consideration besides a numerical majority. It is not always—nay, I might say it is seldom—that the majority of a people are successful in obtaining a common object, or in resisting a common enemy. The great things of the world are effected by individuals: the masses are the tools with which individuals work; and unless they be skilfully handled, their power is thrown away. But let us enter somewhat more into details in considering the present state of affairs in this country."

The conversation which ensued was long, somewhat desultory, and not of such a character as to be particularly interesting to the general reader. No distinct conclusions were arrived at, though the tendency of the whole was to show that each person there present was firmly convinced, the march of arbitrary power was proceeding with such rapid strides, that open resistance might soon become a duty.

Prevented from meeting in Parliament by the system which Charles had adopted, of governing without such assemblies, the only means that the popular leaders had of ascertaining the amount of support on which they might calculate in case of need, was by holding personal conferences with the leading men of the various counties; and such, apparently, was the object of Russell and Sydney in their present visit. The Earl was cautious in his replies to them, pledged himself absolutely to nothing, and argued against the employment of force, except in the last resort: but at the same time he suffered them to perceive that his wishes and his views went with theirs. He spoke with some regret and some bitterness of the flight of the Earl of Shaftesbury (then just known), and he assured Lord Russell that after the receipt of his letter, two days before, he had laid out a plan for allying his family

to that of his most powerful neighbour; by which means almost all the western part of the county would be at his command. Some difficulties had occurred, he said, but those he doubted not to remove very speedily. His only serious apprehension seemed to be in regard to his son, whose views, he declared, were fundamentally different from his own; and he expressed a doubt that anything would ever change them.

"You judge, my good friend," said Lord Russell, "from the conduct and opinions of your noble son regarding the Popish plot, the very existence of which it is now the fashion to disbelieve; but at heart I am sure there is not a truer patriot, nor one to whom the freedom of his country is more dear than Lord Francis. Will you send him to me at Southampton Place, and I think, beyond all doubt, I shall be able to convince him that the time is rapidly coming when every one who really loves liberty, must openly range himself on our side—I do not say for the purpose of armed resistance, but for that of organising such firm and general remonstrance, that the voices of the people must be heard."

"I may send him, my lord," replied the Earl, "and I certainly will; but whether he will go or not, is a question more difficult to resolve. Lord Francis has a will of his own, I can assure you, and does not fail to exercise it."

"I will write him an invitation immediately I arrive in town," said Lord Russell, "and, in the meantime, will take my leave, for it is very late and seems very dark; and we must ride some way before we sleep." Thus saying, he rose; but before he went, the Earl took an opportunity of saying, while Sydney was not attending, "I will write to you further, my lord. Our good friend here is somewhat too bold."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE reader has been annoyed at our digression: the critic has pronounced it a fault to interrupt the narrative at an interesting point, in order to introduce an episodic conversation totally apart from the subject which pre-occupied the mind. But, reader and critic, it was unavoidable, and of all the thousand ways which you point out for arranging the matter differently, there is not one which would have answered its purpose. I had a journey to perform, and was forced to perform it; nor have I delayed by the way, but spurring on my pad with relentless rowels, here I am again at the little gloomy inn, and beside her whom we have left so long.

Of all those whom she had ever met in life, there was not one human being whose face Gertrude Ellerton would not

have preferred to see rather than that of Sir Frederick Beltingham. She knew him to be remorseless, vindictive, unprincipled, daring; one who in an inferior station of life would have fittingly figured amongst those disgraceful followers of high noblemen—then very common—who were ready to undertake anything, however criminal, which required cunning, courage, and unscrupulous determination in its execution; but who, placed by fortune and birth above the mercenary adventurer, distinguished himself from the light libertines of Charles's court, by an intensity in his vices, which had given them a sort of dignity in the eyes of small debauchees, and an impudence in his crimes which had hitherto procured them immunity. Since she had seen him, indeed, he had learned a cunning sort of prudence from one or two sharp lessons; and he affected a sort of indifferent satiety, which had in his case as much policy as vanity in it—although those who pretend to be what the French call *blase*, endeavour generally to compensate vanity for the failing power of enjoyment, by attributing decay to excess, rather than the course of time.

Gertrude, however, knew him only as she had seen him in former years, or as she had heard of him shortly after he was driven ignominiously from her father's house, and her heart sank when she beheld him. There is, however, a peculiar courage in despair, and that came soon to her aid. She felt that her fate depended upon herself alone; that there was nothing he would not dare, nothing he would not do, nothing that his cunning would not contrive, nothing that his resolution would not execute. There was no appeal to his feelings, to his heart, to his understanding, to his fears, to his conscience. She must trust to herself alone, and to God who gives strength even to weakness.

Sir Frederick Beltingham advanced with a gay and careless air after closing the door, and exclaimed, with a light smile, "Welcome, fair lady, welcome to this pleasant inn. We have much to talk of; I have things of great importance to tell you. But you are pale; you are fatigued with your journey, and must have some refreshment. Nay, will you not even shake hands with an old friend?"

"Was it like a friend, Sir Frederick Beltingham," asked Gertrude, who had retreated to the other side of the table,— "was it like a gentleman, was it like a man, to wring a daughter's heart by the tale of a father's dangerous illness, in order to lure her into your power? Was it like anything but a bankrupt swindler, to forge a letter from a parent to a child? I know not how you discovered my retreat; I know not what is your object in bringing me hither, but you will find that

your object will be frustrated, and that all your labour has been thrown away."

"I do not know that," said Beltingham, dryly. "I will try all mild means and persuasions, in the first instance, fair Gertrude, and after that all such as may seem needful for your own happiness, and your father's safety; for let me tell you, that much of the tale you pronounce false, is true. I know not what my fellow added; for he is a man of marvellous imagination, and some judgment—tender too, mighty tender of the fair, and he would doubtless have recourse to all those little fictions which are calculated to disarm resistance, and lead gently and pleasantly to the end in view. But pray remember, sweet Gertrude, that I do not approve of such proceedings. I go boldly to my object, and use no falsehood with you now. To lead you hither, it was necessary to have recourse to skill; but now every word I tell you is truth. You thought you were brought here to tend your father in sickness: you in reality come here to save him from death. His life depends upon you; and it will be well for you to take immediate steps to rescue him from the peril in which he is."

Gertrude gazed in his face, wondering how all this would end, but not alarmed by his words, for she did not believe the tale. She knew him to be so false, she had such immediate proofs of his falsehood before her, that had he uttered the truths of heaven she would have doubted them. She thought it better, however, not to show her incredulity at once, and she replied in a calm tone, "I do not understand you, sir, you speak in riddles, and to justify such conduct as yours, you must be more explicit. I am no reader of enigmas, and love them not where my father's life is said to be at stake."

"I will be more explicit, fair Gertrude," replied Sir Frederick Beltingham; "indeed, so explicit that no doubt shall remain upon your mind. But, first, I will order supper, for you are weary I see, and must ——"

"I need no refreshment," answered Gertrude; "all I require is to have my mind relieved regarding my poor father."

"But I need somewhat more, fair lady," said Beltingham; "I cannot live on the chameleon's diet, and I have ridden hard these two days to bring you news. I will tell you more while they are serving us."

He then opened the door, and without quitting it, ordered some one without to bring in supper. On turning back towards the table again, however, Beltingham contrived to approach, without any apparent design, the side on which Gertrude had been standing; but she became aware of his presence before it was fully executed, and instantly moved to

the other side, resolved to have some defence at least against a man who had once insulted her.

"I am anxious, sir," she said, "to hear of my father. If you have anything true to tell, I beseech you not to keep me longer in suspense."

"You shall have proofs of its truth," replied Beltingham; "but first I will show you the exact position in which he stands, and then you shall judge of the measures to be taken for his safety yourself. Thus, then, it is, fair lady—but, in the meantime, I beseech you, draw yourself that seat; my touching it, I see, would profane it for you—your father landed at Southampton ten days ago. This fact, I think, you are already aware of?"

He put it as a question, but Gertrude was silent, and he went on—"The first person whom Sir William met, of all his old acquaintances, was my humble self. Now, he was wonderfully imprudent in coming at all, for he is now under outlawry, as you well know; but, perhaps, you are not quite aware that, if taken, the process that follows is very simple: the captor hands him to the sheriff, the sheriff to the hangman. No form of trial is needed, no investigation, but the mere reading of his outlawry, and proof of his identity,—then, death!"

He pronounced the last words very slowly, and Gertrude pressed her hand upon her eyes for an instant. "It was imprudent, then, to come at all," continued Beltingham; "but still more imprudent to land at Southampton. As I saw him, he saw me, but would not recognise one whom he judged a dangerous acquaintance. He hurried to an inn, I followed, and had nought to do but say to the first constable I met, 'Arrest me that man; he is an outlaw.' But I am more his friend than he believes, fair Gertrude. I bear no malice for past unkindness. I not only forbore, but aided his departure, telling the landlord of the inn to let him have horses at his own price, and that I would pay the surplus; assuring him, which was true enough, that the gentleman was bound upon business of importance, in which the king's majesty was concerned."

"God reward you for it!" cried Gertrude, warmly: but the motives which he soon after displayed lowered her gratitude considerably.

"I would not accompany him on the road myself," continued Beltingham, well satisfied with the progress he had made, and determined to pursue the same strain; "but I sent two servants to follow him and give him aid in case of need, while I remained at the inn to guard against any danger from inquiry on the part of the magistrates, who are some-

what curious in regard to strangers arriving from France. He went off in great haste, and, in the hurry, left upon the table in the upper room where he had been lodged for a while, this small case, which the landlord brought to me, as one who had shown an interest in the traveller."

At the same time Beltingham drew forth a little bijoutiere, as it was called, of shagreen, and opened it, when, in the midst of several trinkets which she remembered well, Gertrude beheld a small portrait of her mother set in diamonds. "Now," said Beltingham, in continuation, "I must tell you that if my good man Preston informed you Sir William is very ill, he exaggerated; but, nevertheless, the tale is not altogether untrue. He reached Amblecombe, coming, I believe, to visit you; but, within a few steps of the inn door, his horse fell and crushed his leg, so that to ride further for a week or more is altogether impossible. My servants stay near him, and have, doubtless, found means to aid him, though they are utterly ignorant of who or what he is, for I would not trust them with so dangerous a secret."

"Then, is he really here?" cried Gertrude; "is he really in this house? Oh, let me fly to him!"

"You mistake, you mistake, dear lady," replied Sir Frederick Beltingham; this is not Amblecombe. You are five-and-twenty miles distant from that place."

Gertrude sank back into the seat from which she had risen, murmuring, "This is cruel! this is base!"

"To go to him immediately depends upon yourself," said Beltingham; "you have but to speak one word."

"Let me go, then," cried Gertrude, gazing in his face; but she instantly saw she had not understood him rightly; and she asked, in a low and anxious tone, "What is it?"

Two servants, however, entered at the moment, and placed upon the table a clean white cloth, several plates, and forks, and spoons, a large knife for carving, three dishes of meat, apparently, by the odour, exceedingly well cooked, a cork-screw, and two long-necked bottles, with glasses.

Sir Frederick Beltingham maintained a perfect silence while they were busy spreading the cloth and making the other arrangements of the table; but as soon as that was done he made them a sign, and the men withdrew and closed the door.

When they were gone, he drew his chair nearer to the table, and leaning across, said, in a low and gentle voice, "The word is, Yes! Lady, I love you more than life, honour, fortune, heaven! You must be mine!"

Gertrude replied not by a word, but the sudden and irrepressible look of horror and disgust that overspread her face,

stung Beltingham to the heart. The passionate expression of his countenance passed away, and it became cold and stern. "Your father's life is in your hands," he said; "there is a priest within a hundred yards who will unite us; but yet do not answer now. I will give you some time for thought. We will to supper; you shall reply when you are refreshed and have thought; but let the circumstances sink deep into your mind, and reply not rashly."

Sir Frederick Beltingham then seemed to cast off all memory of what had passed, assumed the character of the courteous, if not the gay entertainer, spoke lightly, though in a tender tone, of several indifferent subjects, did not venture to jest, but yet let all he said be cheerful, as if to offer a contrast to the gloomy reflections which he knew lay in Gertrude's breast, and to render them more dark.

And what was Gertrude's conduct? For some minutes she was silent, made no reply to anything he said, neither accepted nor refused the viands he offered, but seemed to remain plunged in the dark ocean of thought into which his words had cast her. But then suddenly she looked up as one awakened from sleep. It seemed to him as if she had taken her resolution, whatever it was; and from her manner, he judged that it was favourable to his wishes, for she now answered when he spoke,—in a tone of deep melancholy, it is true, but still not harshly. He thought that, perhaps, she might judge herself honoured that he still proposed to wed the dowerless daughter of an outlaw, and that such conclusions had been come to by her own mind. He little knew Gertrude Ellerton. However, she took some of the food that was placed before her, for she knew that the vigour of the mind is often affected by the weakness of the body; and when he offered her wine, she did not refuse it, but watched him as he drew out the cork, for if she had seen any sign of the bottle having been opened before, she would not have tasted what it contained. She had heard strange tales of the drugged potions of those days, and she was resolved that her senses should not be lulled to sleep. All was fair, however; the bottle had evidently not been opened, and she drank a small portion of the wine. He filled his own glass often, and drained it to the last drop. He opened even the other bottle, and began upon it, till his cheek became somewhat flushed, and his eye unnaturally bright. Gertrude saw it with alarm, and her last hope was, that he would go on till excitement sunk into stupidity. But he was too wary for that, and at length, remarking, "The fools have brought no fruit," he rose, and partly opened the door, as if with the intention of ordering some. He withdrew instantly, however, and closed

it again; but while it had been open, a sound had reached Gertrude's ear as if several horses were before the house. After a moment's pause near the door, while he seemed to listen, a smile, somewhat bitter and sneering, came upon his lip, and drawing the door back a very little, he put out his arm, and brought the key into the inside.

Poor Gertrude watched his proceedings with an eager eye, then cast a hasty glance over the table, and stretching forth her hand, while his back was turned, took up the large knife, and concealed it beneath the cloth. At the same moment she thought she heard distant steps, and Beltingham turned the key in the door, saying, "Now we shall not be interrupted."

"I beg you would not lock the door, Sir Frederick Beltingham," said Gertrude, aloud; "for that there can be no occasion, as your men without there keep me prisoner enough."

Beltingham made no answer but by a single smile, and returning to the table, took his seat opposite. "It is time, sweet Gertrude," he said, gazing at her with a look of passion, "that we should come to some conclusion. Will you go to your father? In other words, will you instantly give me your hand? I offer you mine: my heart you have had for years. Will you save your father's life? But say the word, and I send for the priest at once. Are you mine?"

"No, I am not, Sir Frederick Beltingham," answered Gertrude, with a great effort. "In the first place, I do not believe the tale you have told. One deceit makes me suspect another."

"I swear by all I hold sacred!" cried Beltingham, vehemently. "Have I not given you proof of what I told you? Do you think that, once having seen and recognised him on these shores, I would ever lose sight of him again till you were mine? But these doubts are pretended, as an excuse to your own conscience for the sacrifice of your father. Now, I tell you, Gertrude Ellerton, that even if you dare to make that sacrifice,—if you are resolved coldly to leave your parent to the fate that shall certainly overtake him,—it shall not serve your purpose. You know me, Gertrude, and that I will keep my word. If you are not my wife, you shall be worse. I have offered you an honourable fate, and your father's life; do not you madly seek dishonour, and a parent's death. Girl, remember that you are in my power, as well as your father."

"Not so much as you suppose, sir," answered Gertrude, with a dauntless look, for her spirit rose with indignation. "You think me defenceless; I am so no longer:" and she raised her hand, clasped tight round the handle of the sharp-pointed knife.

"Put it down on the table," cried Beltingham, in a voice of thunder.

"I will not," answered Gertrude, firmly. "It is here my only defence, my only friend. Do not deceive yourself, either, sir; for if you attempt to touch me, I will use it."

"You shall see that," cried Beltingham; and darting round the table, he sprang upon her. Had Gertrude struck one blow, he was a dead man; for as he stretched forth his arms to clasp her, his breast was left unguarded; but a moment of hesitation lost her the advantage. Her heart failed—she could not strike, and the next instant both her wrists were caught in his strong grasp. But in terror and agitation, she uttered shriek upon shriek, and she thought she heard steps running quick.

"Silence! silence!" he cried; "I will not hurt you—I did but jest—Silence! put down the knife."

But Gertrude held it fast, and, encouraged by his evident alarm, shrieked for help again and again.

The next instant the door was shaken violently and burst open into the room, and two gentlemen rushed in with their swords drawn, followed by several servants.

Beltingham let go his hold, took a step back, and unsheathed his rapier, exclaiming, "Back! What seek you here? How dare you intrude?"

Gertrude sprang forward, and fell overpowered at the feet of William Lord Russell, while the gentleman at his side darted past her, and she heard the clashing of swords.

"Separate them! separate them!" cried Lord Russell, as she clasped his knees; but the next instant there was a groan, a heavy fall, and a dead silence.

CHAPTER XVII.

How often, when we gaze upon the magnificence of the summer storm, the brightness of the rapid lightning leaves the eye insensible for many minutes after to any less vivid light; and often, in the same manner, the passing of a rapid and momentous event, which relieves us from some great peril, leaves us unconscious of all else for a time. The sense of deliverance was all that Gertrude felt for several minutes. She saw not who were those that had entered; she beheld not what passed at the other side of the room. She was delivered; that was enough: and her spirit was returning thanks to God, while the body, under the persisting influence of terror, was still at Lord Russell's feet, and the arms clasping his knees.

"You have killed him, I fear, Sydney," were the first words she distinctly heard. "Is he dead?"

"I neither know nor care," answered Algernon Sydney, putting up his sword. "I found him offering violence to a woman. He drew first, to maintain the wrong; and he has paid the penalty. It is that treacherous minion of the court, Beltingham. Did you not recognise him?"

"Yes, yes; but who is this?" said Russell. "Surely I know this beautiful face. Is it not Gertrude Ellerton? Dear lady, how came you here?" and he raised her tenderly from the ground.

"By that base man's treacherous contrivances," answered Gertrude, with indignant eagerness. "He forged a letter, as if from my father, telling me he had returned to England, was sick, and required my immediate attendance.—I have it here.—He sent a carriage and a servant for me; and thus, having lured me hither, thought he had me altogether in his power. Oh, my lord! I know you were my father's enemy; but yet I have always heard you are generous and noble; protect and help me, I beseech you."

"Indeed, lady, you are quite mistaken," replied Lord Russell; "I am far from your father's enemy, and would, in the time of peril, have done aught I could to save him; for I know—I believed from my heart—that he was innocent; and I only sought to strike the guilty. But let me take this weapon from your hand, my poor young lady; and come with me, from this chamber. Sydney, let the man have help, at all events. I will return in a moment."

He was leading Gertrude from the room, when a stout servant planted himself in the way, saying, "You have killed my master amongst you."

"He has met a just punishment for a very high offence," answered Lord Russell. "I know not whether he be dead or living; but you had better go and tend him. You shall have full liberty to do so; but you must not quit this house till the conduct of your master and yourself to this young lady has been further inquired into."

"There are several more of them," said Gertrude, in a low and anxious tone; "that is not the man who was sent to lure me hither."

"Where are your comrades?" demanded Lord Russell, turning again to the man.

"Becher has run away, at the first noise," answered the man, "and Preston too, I believe. I never liked the job; but I will not shirk from my master."

"You take the more honourable part," answered Lord Russell. "Come, dear lady;" and he spoke a few words to one of his own attendants.

While pausing, with her hand in his, near the door, Ger-

trude gave a timid glance to the opposite side of the chamber, and although the table partly interrupted the view, she saw a servant in the colours of the house of Leicester supporting on his knee the head and shoulders of Sir Frederick Beltingham and opening his coat, while Algernon Sydney stood by, gazing down upon the wounded man, with his arms crossed upon his broad chest. Before Lord Russell had concluded his orders to the servant, Beltingham moved his hand faintly towards his head, and Sydney said, "Tear that linen cloth, and make two compresses; then bind them on the chest and back. The blade came out near the shoulder."

Gertrude turned her eyes away, with a feeling of sick giddiness; and the moment after Lord Russell led her through the passage and up the stairs to a room, just above that in which she had lately suffered so much. It was neatly furnished, as a sort of sitting-room, with a table in the midst, on which appeared lights, writing materials, and two or three scattered sheets of paper, on which a careless, but not inexperienced, hand had sketched, with pen and ink, a number of faces, in different positions, and several horses, dogs, and deer.

"Remain here, dear lady," said Lord Russell, in a kind tone. "You will be quite safe, and in a few minutes I will rejoin you. I must go down and see what can be done to avert any evil consequences from following this unfortunate affair. Sydney is too hasty; he would have served you better by keeping his sword sheathed."

"I trust the wretched man will not die," said Gertrude; "it is a terrible thing to go to the presence of God loaded with unrepented sins."

"It is, indeed," said Lord Russell; "but I trust such will not be the case. He was reviving when we left the room; but I will be back with you directly, and tell you more."

Thus saying, he left her, and seating herself at the table, Gertrude fell into deep and anxious thought. It was indeed not continuous: nor did it rest upon one subject; for she was still too much agitated with all which had lately passed for the mind to settle calmly upon any single object. All the particulars of the base deceit that had been practised on her; the conduct of Sir Frederick Beltingham; the terrible danger she had escaped; the effort she had herself made, and the ultimate designs of the daring and infamous man from whose power she had been so lately delivered, would come across her and distract her attention from the two questions on which she wished to fix it: How should she herself act? and, What was likely to be the effect of all that had just taken place upon the fate of her father?

Was he really at Amblecombe, or was this a falsehood told

for the purpose of alarming her? She feared that it was true, for she knew him to be in England; and the small jewel-case, with her mother's picture, afforded presumptive evidence that Beltingham must have followed his track very closely. The next question was, whether one of the first acts of the man who lay wounded below, would not be to denounce Sir William Ellerton as a returned outlaw? She knew him to be a vindictive and unscrupulous man, and she doubted not that he would seek for vengeance. "Even now," she thought, "those two servants of his, who have fled, may carry the tidings of my poor father's return to some neighbouring magistrate; and, before I have time to warn him, he may be arrested."

But how could she act? with whom could she take counsel? Lord Russell had shown himself one of the sternest and most determined, though one of the most calm and just of what was called the country party, by whom all those suspected of having any share in the alleged Popish plot had been pursued with unrelenting severity. After some reflection, however, she remembered the words he had spoken below. He had assured her that he did not doubt her father's innocence, and he would willingly have done all he could to save him. The honour and uprightness of Lord Russell was not to be suspected. Severe he might have shown himself—perhaps, in the heat of party, unjust; but false, never. He was known to be generous, too, kind and affectionate in private life; and, although a touch of the old Roman spirit might have led him to trample all private affections under foot when he believed the interest of his country required a great sacrifice, yet in a case like the present, where no principles, just or mistaken, interfered, his heart would have room to act, and, at all events, his honour might be trusted. She resolved, then, to confide in him, and act by his advice; and when this determination was formed, she became more composed, and listened to the various sounds which made themselves heard in the house, watching anxiously for his return.

As she did so, her eyes rested on the sketches of heads which lay upon the table; and drawing the sheets of paper nearer, she read the words that were written underneath. One of the first her eyes lighted on was an exceedingly good likeness of Algernon Sydney; and written underneath it appeared "worthy man." Then came a very fierce-looking head, with a patch over one eye, beneath which was written, "Colonel Rumsey, worthy man." Then appeared a sketch, which she instantly recognised as the portrait of Hyde, Lord Rochester, and written underneath it, "man worthy." On examining further, she found that each of the heads was

designated in this peculiar manner, being subscribed either "man worthy," or "worthy man."

She paused not long upon them, however, for the sound of several feet moving up the stairs was heard, with that of several persons speaking; and then a distant door was opened and closed. She remained about five minutes more alone, and then a quick step was heard in the passage; the door opened; and Lord Russell entered alone.

"I have kept you waiting long, my dear young lady," he said, seating himself beside her; "but I was obliged to stay for a few minutes with that unfortunate man. He has completely revived, and has been carried up to bed, very faint in truth; but, as the bleeding has stopped, I trust he will recover. Perhaps sickness and pain may give him a new view of life, though I cannot say he shows much amendment at present."

He paused thoughtfully for a moment, gazing abstractedly at the papers on the table; and then, seeming suddenly to remark the objects on which his eyes were fixed, he took up one of the sheets and examined it more closely. "These men are mad," he murmured; and tearing the papers to pieces, he threw them under the table.

"Now, my fair lady," he continued, laying his hand kindly upon Gertrude's, "I have got some news for you, which must not alarm you; for although it was told me with evidently the most malevolent intention, the informer misunderstood the character of him to whom he spoke. Sir Frederick Beltingham has just given me intimation that your father is actually in England, and at a place called Amblecombe, some five-and-twenty or thirty miles distant. He imagined that I would cause Sir William's immediate apprehension; and I have left him in ignorance of my intentions, lest his malice should find other and surer means of gratification. I must not conceal from you, however, that your father is in danger; for as outlawry has passed against him, he is precluded the chances of a trial. I have at once caused intimation to be sent to him that his presence in this country, and even his place of concealment, are known, and have advised him, as an old friend, to return to the Continent immediately."

"Oh, let me accompany your messenger, my lord!" cried Gertrude; "I fear my poor father cannot fly, for I was told that his horse had fallen and hurt him."

"That is a fiction," answered Lord Russell. "This man's only fear was that he might escape ere he could be apprehended. The messenger, too, is gone by this time; and even were he here, I, venturing to take upon me a father's part towards you, would not let you go. The distance is consider-

able, you would not arrive till morning. If you travelled on horseback, after all the fatigues and anxieties you have undergone, you would injure yourself without benefit to him; and if you sought any other conveyance, you would delay intelligence where not a moment is to be lost. Besides, dear lady, your presence would only embarrass your father's movements, and I have a plan for you, by which you may perhaps yet see him before he leaves England. First, however, you must tell me all that has happened, and you may do so frankly and without fear; for, on my honour, no Popish priest ever held the secrets of the confessional more sacred than I will hold yours. Speak, then, to me, Gertrude, as a father; for I have not forgotten the time when, at my good Lord of Southampton's, you sat upon my knee, at eight years old, and twisted the tangles of your long brown hair round the buttons of my coat."

Gertrude smiled faintly, as a dim recollection of other happier days came up like a golden mist spreading over the rude features of the present scene. "It was fully my intention, my noble lord," she said, "to tell you all that has happened to me, for I know well that I can trust you, though I have indeed nought to confide in which there is any danger, now that you know the secret of my father being here; and let me add, that there is none in whom he would more willingly have me trust than you. I remember well in the terrible hour when he was forced to fly and leave us all in London, amongst his last words were, 'Russell will soon learn that I am innocent—Russell will not suffer me long to suffer persecution. He is severe, but just.'"

"God forgive me, if I have been severe!" replied Lord Russell. "I acted but by the light He gave me. As to your father, I could do nothing for him, lady. By that time, the wild horses of popular fury had the bit in their teeth, and ran away with justice and equity. I had no more power to guide their course, than a child to stop an avalanche. There was much done that I regretted; but it was not done by me; and, had your father stayed, I would have tried all, braved all dangers, to save a man I knew to be innocent; but the fury was long in subsiding; and when men's minds became more calm, I had no power to interfere. I am now the least powerful man in England, with those who have power; and the people, alas! have none; for their voice is stifled. But tell me all that has happened to you; how you are here in England; how separated from your father and Lady Ellerton. Enter into details as with one who takes a sincere interest in them; and then listen to my plan for you, unless what you are about to say should require some change. Sydney has

retired to rest, for he has ridden fifty miles further than I have to-day, and he will sleep as sound after his encounter with this bad man, as if he had just come from hunting a fox or running down a wolf."

"It is a long tale, my lord," replied Gertrude, "and a sad one; but it shall be told as briefly as possible. My mother, as you doubtless know, has been twice in England, to plead my father's cause with those in power. The first time, she could not bring me with her; and she was detained longer than she expected. When it was necessary to go over again, she told me that I was to accompany her, and that she should probably leave me for a time in my native land; for so long as she was likely to be absent frequently, she thought the French capital not a good place for one so young. We lived in great retirement, it is true; seeing no one."

"So much so," said Lord Russell, "that by many your father was supposed to be dead, and strange stories circulated regarding his fate, till, about a month ago, he was met by Cavendish, at St. Germain's. Pardon my interrupting you; but let me add, your mother was quite right, that same capital of France is the head spring of the corruption of Europe; full to overflowing of political, religious, and moral vice."

"Notwithstanding our seclusion," continued Gertrude, "I will own I saw and heard much that was not pleasing; and though the thought of living separate from my parents was painful, I would have gladly dwelt with them in any land rather than that. At length my mother and I came over upon some hopes that were held out to her, though I know not upon what ground; but her expectations failed, and after a brief stay in London, she brought me down to a small cottage situated on a piece of the Millerton grounds, close to Malwood Park. There my old nurse had lived undisturbed ever since our flight, and probably it was judged I might remain there in secret better than anywhere else. But I think my mother had other motives too; for the night before we left London, she had long consultations with a man of law, and on leaving me, her strongest injunctions were to conceal myself most carefully from every one, to adopt the habit of a peasant girl, and especially to hide myself from the eyes of Lord Virepont and all his household."

"Perhaps," said Lord Russell, "some future advantage might be seen in holding some sort of possession of even a part of the property, in case the grant to Lord Virepont was not perfect.—There might be such indeed; but I am not learned in such matters."

"I lived there peacefully enough for two years," continued Gertrude, "and never ran any risk of discovery except once

in the year, when the steward of Ellerton manor came to hold a court before the cottage door, as is the custom of the manor; but then I betook me to the park till he was gone."

"I see—I see," said Lord Russell, thoughtfully. "Did he ever attempt to disturb your good old nurse in possession?"

"Never," answered Gertrude; "but when the court was over, he used to go in and talk with her kindly, she has told me; staying about half an hour. He always brought her, too," the fair girl added, with a smile, "a pair of red gloves, and half a sieve of young peas."

"He is a wise man," answered Lord Russell, gravely; "go on, sweet lady."

Gertrude then proceeded; but the rest of her little history, as far as it is needful to tell it, the reader already knows. At one point, indeed, she hesitated, and perhaps was not quite so frank as she could herself have wished. When she came to tell of her flight with the juggler, she gave no description of her companion, merely saying that a gentleman had sought refuge in the cottage wounded, and that the same gentleman had aided her flight the following day. Lord Russell smiled as he marked the vague manner in which she spoke. "You need not name him, fair lady," he said, "I can divine who he was."

"I think not, my lord," answered Gertrude, too sincere to mislead him wilfully. But her noble companion replied, "Yes, yes, I can;" and Gertrude went on to the conclusion of her history. "And now, my dear lord," she added, when the tale was done, "as God has sent you to my deliverance in the moment of my greatest danger, I do beseech you, leave not your good work incomplete. I know that the unfortunate are apt to build hopes on a small foundation, and to think others have power, who themselves know that they have none. Yet I cannot believe that the voice of William Lord Russell will ever be without weight in England; and I will entreat—on my knees, if you will let me—that you raise that voice in behalf of one whom you know to be innocent. But let the outlawry be reversed, let my father be delivered from that great peril, and then for the rest he can plead himself."

"My voice would but destroy him, my poor child," said Lord Russell; "and besides, there are circumstances which must silence me in asking any favour of the Court, as much as if I were dumb. It cannot be, Gertrude. Yet lose not heart. The relations of my wife—especially her late father, the good Earl of Southampton—in times past, rendered such great service to the throne, that those who remain may well petition successfully for the pardon of one whom the King himself would have seen suffer most unwillingly. I think

they will not fail—though the Court and country are in a strange position at this time; for we see that the very men whom the former would fain have screened from the just indignation of the latter, are still under punishment, while those who demanded that an example should be made of them, are the objects of courtly hatred, and even persecution. The Court, in fact, either from indifference, intrigue, or a conviction of their guilt, leaves many of its creatures to their fate, with unlimited power to save them; and yet treats those who impeached them as if they, too, were criminals. But your father's is a case apart, and doubtless his friends may and will succeed in time."

"But you said, my lord, there was a chance of my seeing him before he departs," said Gertrude, anxiously returning to what was one of the chief points of present interest to her; for while men generalize, women invariably particularize.

"I did," answered Lord Russell, "and still think it may be so, though the first great object is to get this outlawry reversed. But now, hear my plan, sweet Gertrude, in which, though formed before I spoke with you, I see no reason to make any change. It is this,—that you return not to your late place of refuge; but that, for the present, you take up your abode at Southampton Place. My beloved wife you already know; though, perhaps, you were too young when you last saw her to feel and appreciate all her excellence. But she, I can answer for it, will receive you and treat you as would a mother or an elder sister. In London, you may aid in moving friends on your father's behalf; and in the few hurried lines I wrote to him, but now, I counselled that he should not attempt to return by the same road he came, but rather hasten up to the capital, and lie concealed in a house I indicated, till a vessel could be found to carry him safely back to France."

"Oh, that is joyful, indeed!" cried Gertrude, clasping her hands. "Good, kind, noble friend, how can I thank you?"

"I deserve no thanks, Gertrude," said Lord Russell. "I do assure you that, although in seeking our country's good, the ungovernable engines we are forced to wield may—nay, they must—injure many as innocent as ourselves, and although we must still unflinchingly press them forward, at the risk of their crushing the best affections of our hearts, yet there is no private atonement which an honest man will not be joyful to offer to another honest man, who has unjustly suffered by the efforts made to procure or secure a people's liberty. Such has been your father's case; and although it was no fault of mine that the innocent were confounded with the guilty in the rage of the foolish populace and the greed

of hungry informers, yet, as I was one to use vigorously the weapon placed in our hands for the defence of our freedom, I should be right glad to soothe the ills of those I wounded unaware, even were the person in question not your father and my friend. No mention of thanks, then, Gertrude! Come with me to London, place yourself under the protection of Lady Russell, and perhaps, at my house, you may see one whose society may not be altogether displeasing to you."

He spoke the last words with a smile; and although Gertrude saw no probability of the interpretation she would have willingly given them being correct, yet they called the warm blood into her cheek for an instant, less with shame than hope. "I know not how I shall venture to appear before Lady Russell," she said, "in such a garb as this; and without sending to the cottage near Malwood, I can procure no other. Besides, my lord, I must let my poor old Martha know where I am to be found, and perhaps had better bid her come to me in London, for——"

"By no means, dear lady," said Lord Russell; "you must not withdraw her from that place without your father's consent. I will send over in the morning early for all that you may want, and the messenger can give her information of your safety. At Southampton Place you will find tendence enough. The circumstances you have mentioned to me, which neither your father nor Lady Ellerton could foresee, fully justify you in leaving the place of asylum they had assigned you, but not in taking away one who may have been placed there for purposes of importance. There is one thing, however, which I have forgotten, namely, to order a room to be prepared for you here. To-night you must do without an Abigail; but doubtless, my dear young friend, as a cottage-girl you have learned to be your own waiting-woman on occasions."

"Assuredly," answered Gertrude, with a smile; "and yet, my dear lord, I would rather have had some woman with me, for I have fears of this place. The people of this house were evidently in league with the man who has treated me so shamefully. When first I found he had locked the door upon me, I called loudly for help, but no one came; and yet I think they must have heard me."

"The man of the house is one," said Lord Russell, with a grave and somewhat bitter look, "who drives a trade in the most precious of commodities—conscience. He was a republican in Cromwell's days; a vehement restorationist under the present King. He has been Presbyterian, Puritan, Episcopalian, and will be Papist. He has but one kind of prudence, and one kind of honour; but those, as his sole pos-

sessions, he values very highly, and from them has never been known to deviate. He never meddles with any other man's actions. He never reveals anything he has seen or heard. He has a happy art, too, of baffling all inquiries; so that even to me, whom he knows well, he cannot give the straightforward truth. I asked if there were any gentlemen in the house when I arrived. He replied, 'No;' and yet, though the falsehood was palpable, I will answer for it he has some plausible excuse to make it seem like truth. Nevertheless, do not fear, I will see that your room is so situated that your first call would bring assistance. Indeed, I believe that some of our men must sleep in this passage; for the house is not very roomy, and Sydney and I, for various reasons, are travelling well attended."

Notwithstanding all her kind friend's care, Gertrude could not banish all apprehension from her mind, for her nerves were shaken by the events of the night, and at length she retired to rest in a small chamber near that of Lord Russell. She did not content herself with merely locking the door, but piled up various articles of furniture against it, which, though they might not act as a defence in case of need, would, at all events, serve as an alarm.

When she lay down, however, weariness overpowered her, and she slept almost immediately. After some time, confused dreams visited her pillow. She thought she was walking with Francis De Vipont, when suddenly Lord Alcester came upon them, and loud and angry words succeeded between her lover and his kinsman. She could hear the voice of Lord Francis as plain as if it sounded close to her ear; when, in a moment, the form of Lord Alcester changed to that of Sir Frederick Beltingham; and swords were drawn, and rapid passes exchanged, till, in the agony of fear, she awoke and found the sun, already high, pouring a flood of light through the uncurtained window.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE evening of a bright and beautiful day in the end of May—that day, some of the stirring events of which we have already seen—fell sweetly over the greater part of England, the showers and storms which had vexed the preceding week having been wafted away towards the west, to spend their remaining fury upon the bosom of the wide Atlantic. On a few spots throughout that fair and beautiful island, which comprises within its craggy shores more varied and more beautiful scenery than perhaps any land of all the earth can show, did the sweet light of evening rest more pleasantly.

than on a small gently-sloping valley at the distance of about ten miles from Ellerton Castle, and thirteen or fourteen from Malwood Hall. The valley was richly cultivated, with a fine trout stream running through it, and with the slopes which formed it, so gentle, that the sun in the morning looked into every part thereof ere he had risen ten minutes above the real horizon, and did not withdraw his beams in the evening till he was on the point of bidding our land good-night. Near the middle of this little vale, and at the distance of about a mile and a half from the first houses of the little town of Wincombe, some thirty acres of ground were laid out as a little park. There were woods, and meadows without fences, lawns, and detached groups of old trees; and, in the midst, with two well-kept roads winding up to it, and passing in pleasant meanders through the copses, was a small house of two stories, kept in beautiful repair, though not of very modern date. It was the residence of what a century or two before would have been called a Franklin; but that name had passed away, or nearly so, into the catalogue of obsolete things; and the word Yeoman did not exactly express the class to which I refer. The truth is, that, at this period, was springing up in England a new class, the rise of which had been greatly aided by, if it had not actually originated in, the Great Rebellion. The extravagances of the reign of James I. which had ruined the finances of the State, and prepared the way for a great revolution, had impoverished the nobility of the court, and had caused hereditary rank to strip itself of hereditary property. In the first instance, however, the lands, soon burdened with heavy loans, and then eaten up by accumulating interest, had passed into the hands of city usurers and wealthy merchants, who had looked upon them merely as matters of commerce—temporary investments, to be disposed of again like a bale of goods, as soon as a fitting opportunity occurred. But a more fiery and terrible period soon followed, when, instead of wasting away by slow degrees, the property of the aristocracy was obliged to be melted down and coined into gold at once, according as the exigencies of the time required. The raising of a troop of horse, the equipment of a regiment of infantry, a large fine inflicted by the Parliament, the necessity of instant flight, often conveyed a manor or part of a manor, a park, a mansion, or a whole estate, to one or more members of what are now faintly called the producing class; and thus rose up from the democracy a body of freeholders, superior in wealth, intelligence, and tenure to the old franklin, and only inferior in extent of possession to the ancient vassal of the crown. About eight hundred acres of the valley which I have de-

scribed had, by one or other of the processes of which we have been speaking, passed first into the hands of Mr. Harrison Myrtle, who had previously cultivated a farm, consisting of two hundred acres of his own, and five hundred more rented of the lord of the manor of Wincombe, and thence to his son, Richard, with whom the reader is already acquainted. How Mr. Myrtle, senior, had obtained the money to make the purchase, even at the low rate to which the civil war reduced landed property, was a marvel to some of his neighbours; but to those who had watched his course narrowly, it was no marvel at all. He was a man of a very penurious disposition,—at least he became so after the death of his wife,—and he had that peculiar instinct, which some persons possess, by which the chances of a good speculation are foreseen long before the event happens. At the period when the royal and parliamentary armies were drawing near Wincombe, he wisely calculated that men must eat before they can fight; and, not contented with the corn in his own garners, he quietly purchased, at a low price, all that was in the garners of his less far-sighted neighbours. It was, indeed, rather a hazardous speculation, for generals in those days did not always pay for the food their soldiers consumed; but Mr. Myrtle managed so well, that he not only sold all his corn at his own price, but obtained the money also; and saving very nearly all he gained, transmitted a comfortable freehold to his son. This son was in almost every respect different from his father. Contented with what he possessed, he had no desire of acquisition; and though a good deal of hereditary shrewdness had descended to him, it took quite a different direction from that which it had followed in his parent. He could tell to a few yards which way a fox or a hare would turn, but cared little for the turn of the market. He would calculate to a few minutes the feeding time of birds, beasts, and fishes, but never made a penny by feeding an army.

The house within was not only neatly but handsomely furnished, and everything was in excellent order; and, though two rooms, especially appropriated to the purpose, were filled with articles which did not suit hall or saloon,—such as fishing-rods, baskets, kettles, lines, flies, reels, guns, shot-pouches, powder-horns, game-bags, leashes, whistles, muzzles, and whips,—not the slightest irregularity was apparent, but everything was arranged with excellent precision, and could be found at a moment's notice. The dog-kennel and the stable, kindred edifices, lay close together at the back of the house; but, though almost all the hounds, of various degree, were at this time confined to their den, yet two or three old favourites, to whom years had taught discretion, were extended on

the gravel or the grass in front of the dwelling, enjoying the last rays of sunshine, and occasionally snarling at each other if any attempt to trespass was made upon a prescribed spot.

As evening closed, however, the dogs of privilege withdrew, one by one, with measured steps to their usual place of repose; but it was more than an hour after when four horses stopped at the door of the house, and Dick Myrtle, with Lord Francis de Vipont and their two companions, sprang to the ground. Dick called about him in the tone of a master; and, running up with great alacrity, a man dressed as a labourer, and another bearing more resemblance to a genuine groom, came round from behind and took the horses.

"This way, my lord, this way," said Dick Myrtle. "You, lads, go into the hall and call for meat and drink. You know the way, Spilman: and you, Johnny, are not so dull as to miss the road to the larder. I'll be with you in a minute; for, good faith, I am ravenous both for meat and drink. Now my good lord, here is my little parlour—not so fine as the saloon at Ellerton, or the hall at Morsover, but it does for a bachelor growing old."

As he spoke, he closed the door behind him, and then added, in a lower tone, "I will now tell you all about it, my lord; but I did not like to speak out before those fellows, and they kept as close to our heels as the hounds to a spent fox. You saw I did as your lordship bade me about the bail; but the bond was a long while drawing, and when I came out, the young lord, your cousin, was gone. Some of the people whom I spoke with said he had gone off towards Ellerton."

"I saw him coming up as I rode away again," said Lord Francis; "but did you obtain a moment with the juggler?"

"Oh, yes," answered Myrtle, "he could not well refuse to speak to his bail; and he bade me tell you that she whom you seek is safe and well, and that if you want further news of her, you must seek it at Wellstead's. He is a gay companion, my good lord, and mocked rarely at Lord Alcester. He does not laugh loud or long; but there is more merriment in a moment of his laughter, than in a hoarse peal from other folks."

"Did he say nought of himself?" asked the young nobleman.

"Not a word, my lord," replied Dick Myrtle. "He asked, indeed, where you lodged to-night, and whether you had gone back to Ellerton; and I told him that you had gone to the castle, but were to meet me on the road between this and Malwood, and would lodge here. Thereat he nodded his head, and said he would give me a cup of wine for my kind

offices; of which I was right glad, as I had not stayed to drink. But when I put the full glass to my mouth it was empty, and that was all my reward."

Lord Francis did not seem to hear the anecdote with which Dick Myrtle concluded his tale, but replied to what had gone before, "I had my second ride to Malwood to no purpose, Dick; for the good old woman could not, or would not tell me anything of where I could find her I seek."

"Perhaps she did not like the seeking, my lord," answered his companion; "and, in faith and truth, she was not altogether wrong. I do not in the least doubt your lordship's given word; but you will own that it is enough to scare a prudent granny, to find such a falcon hovering about her nursling dove."

"She knows better than to fear, my good friend," replied Lord Francis; "but I must have tidings ere I sleep. Can you not send up one of your men to Wellstead's, to ask if he have anything for me? He is quick and shrewd, and will understand at a word."

"I will go myself," answered Dick Myrtle. "I have not ridden above fifty miles to-day, and I can be there and back in an hour."

But Lord Francis would not hear of this arrangement; and the personage who acted the part of groom in Dick Myrtle's household was despatched to Wellstead's little inn, to make the proposed inquiry, and inform the honest landlord that Lord Francis de Vipont was lodged for the night at what was called Wincombe Manor. When all this was arranged, and the man had departed, Dick Myrtle would fain have shown his reverence for his noble guest by causing supper to be served to him apart; for even the democratic spirit of the rebellion had not banished that respect for high station which is inherent in Englishmen, as a part and portion of their deference for the laws and institutions which they themselves have had a share in framing.

Lord Francis, however, would not hear of such distinctions. "We are all camaradoes on these occasions, Dick," he said. "We will go into the hall, and take our portion with the rest. Let the fare be no better or worse on my account."

Though the two young men, Spilman, the miller's son, and dull Johnny Green, might consider the presence of Lord Francis an honour to their meal, yet it certainly proved some restraint; for the conversation which they were carrying on as they walked up and down the hall, to stretch their limbs after a long day's riding, while waiting for meat and drink, stopped the moment that Dick Myrtle and his noble guest entered. When the cold roast beef and the flagons of beer,

with an enormous pasty, were at length put upon the table, and the great levelling appetite had assumed its sway, they took up the subject again, Spilman saying, "He'll die sure enough, Johnny; for Hincks, the barber, who has been tending him, told me that the sword had gone through his liver, and that the other fellow had given him a crack over the crown that would have broken a bull's costard."

"There was no other fellow at all," replied dull Johnny, across the table. "Hincks told a lie."

"Who are you talking of?" cried Dick Myrtle. "Whose liver has been pinked? Whose costard has been broken? I thought such things never happened within ten miles without my knowing it."

"This was further than ten miles from your place, Master Myrtle," answered Spilman. "It all happened the last night. As Lord Howard of Escrick—he's a bad one—was coming from Malwood Hall, he and his people were set upon by some men in the park—I dare say he deserved it—and my lord himself got a cut across the nose—I am glad of it—and some of the men were driven through the lower gate into the river, where one of the horses was drowned. That was no great matter, for it was not worth five pounds; but a servant-ad from these parts—a wild youth, but not so bad as the rest—got a poke in the side from one man, and a cut over the head from another—at least, so Hincks the barber says—and he is now lying at the cottage, just a mile below the Goose-in-Spectacles, not expecting to get over the day."

"But what do you know of it, Johnny?" asked Myrtle. "You seem to think Spilman is not right in his story."

"All wrong together," replied Johnny Green. "I heard it from the man's own mouth. Sloane is his name. I went down last night at two with Squire Groves, the justice, to take down what he said; for the man thought himself dying, and Tom the clerk was so drunk he could not see, and nobody else in our village can write but I: so I heard it all, and wrote it down, too."

"Well, my good fellow, what did he say?" inquired Lord Francis.

"Why, he said, my lord," answered dull Johnny Green, "that when he and his lord came away from Malwood that night with Sir William Farleigh, they stopped in the park to drub the juggler man who had offended Lord Escrick; and when they saw him coming, they fell upon him; but they found out it would not do; for Sloane says he is sure the devil was in him and his horse too. He cut Lord Howard over the nose, knocked Farleigh off his horse, pinked poor Sloane, and drove two others into the river."

"You do not mean to say that the juggler alone did all this?" said Lord Francis.

"He and the devil," answered Johnny Green; "because Sloane said, that they had waited till all his black fellows had passed; for they went on first, and he came ten minutes or so after. No, my lord, there was nobody but himself to be seen, though Sloane said he was sure the devil was there. But he confessed that they set upon the man first; and though Howard and Farleigh had left a note asking for a warrant against him, Squire Groves, who is a bit of a wag, said the warrant ought to be against them, and as to the devil, if he were there at all, he didn't know a constable as would like to make the caption."

"What, one man lick six!" cried Dick Myrtle; "they must be desperate cowards, I think."

"They were desperate drunk, according to Sloane's account," answered Johnny Green. "He told the truth, however, so far as he knew it, though he let out that his lord had wanted him to tell a lie, and make out that the man had attacked them. But the poor fellow thought he was going to die every minute, and so he spoke the truth."

"It is a strange story altogether," said Lord Francis; "but I think I know something of it."

"So do I," answered dull Johnny; "for I have seen something this day that I never thought to see again."

"And pray what that may be?" demanded the young nobleman.

"It does not matter, my lord," replied the other. "I will keep a good tongue in my head, or at all events a safe one. It is no business of mine, and so I say nothing."

Though Dick Myrtle and the young nobleman pressed him somewhat hard, Johnny Green could not be prevailed upon to utter another word upon the subject; and the whole party remained round the supper table till the sound of horses' feet was heard coming quickly up, and Lord Francis, rose saying, "There is our messenger from Wellstead's inn."

"Hark!" cried Dick Myrtle; "there are more horses than one. Wellstead has got upon his nag, and is come down himself."

By this time Lord Francis was at the door of the hall; and in the passage he was met by the worthy landlord of the inn, whose face bore by no means a satisfactory expression.

"Here is a note for you, my lord," he said; "but I have more news for you, so pray read it quick."

Dick Myrtle, who was following, ran back into the hall for a candle, and when he returned, closed the door after him,

saying, "Had you not better come into the parlour, my lord?"

"No, no," answered Lord Francis, taking the candle and holding it between him and the paper. The words were few and soon read; and a well-pleased smile came upon the young nobleman's countenance. "What more, Wellstead?" he said, as soon as he had done reading.

"Why, my lord," replied the landlord, "the young lady is no longer at my sister's. A man came with a carriage this evening, pretending to be a servant sent by her father from Amblecombe. He brought a letter too, and she set out with him directly, for the story was that her father was very ill, if not dying. However, my sister Betty, who is shrewd in her way, suspected that all was not right, and watched the carriage when it went. At the end of the hamlet where the roads part, she was made sure that all was very wrong; for the driver did not take the Amblecombe way at all, but went off towards Morrington. So then she ran up to tell me directly; and I did not know for the life of me what to do. I sent up to see if you had come back to the Castle, and my lad had just come down again, when your message arrived; so I thought it best to speak with you myself; and just at the gates here I met with a gentleman who wants to talk to you too.—He is waiting without, if you will go to him, for he won't come in."

"I will stay to speak with no one now," answered Lord Francis, impatiently; "I must follow to Morrington with all speed. Let me have my horse out at once, Dick. Morrington!—What can this mean?"

"You had better speak a word or two with the gentleman without," said Wellstead, approaching, and speaking in a low voice; "he can tell you more than any one."

"Ha! who is he?" demanded Lord Francis.

"He will tell you himself, my lord," replied the landlord; and passing him, the young nobleman set down the candle, and went out upon the green before the house.

The night was dark, for the moon had not yet risen; but by the faint light which ever lingers in the sky of the late spring—like hope in the mind of youth even in the midst of misfortune and adversity—Lord Francis beheld a tall figure still on horseback, sitting perfectly motionless, like some equestrian statue. The stranger had placed himself at a little distance from the house; and the young lord crossed over the green to approach him.

The next moment Lord Francis might be seen leaning upon the shoulder of the horse with his hand clasped in that of the rider. Their conversation was not long, but it seemed eager;

and in a few minutes Lord Francis returned to the house, where he found Dick Myrtle and his two companions preparing, unasked, to accompany him. In a minute more the horses were brought round, Wellstead was dismissed with thanks, and springing into the saddle, the rest of the party rode up to the side of the stranger who had accompanied the landlord, when by the faint light, Dick Myrtle recognised the man for whom he had volunteered his bail in the morning.

"We had better keep back," said dull Johnny Green, twitching Myrtle's coat, and speaking in a low voice.

Myrtle turned round to look at him; and though the expression of the man's features could not be discovered, he replied, "Perhaps we had better;" and instantly drew in his rein.

The way to Morrington was long; all the horses were tired, and could not be urged to their quickest pace, so that it was an hour past midnight ere they reached the small town to which their steps were directed. Along the whole road, Lord Francis and the juggler had kept up an eager but low-toned conversation; broken, indeed, by occasional fits of thought, but always resumed again, in a few minutes, as earnestly as ever. In the town of Morrington there was at that time but one inn; and the party of travellers fully expected that they should have to knock up the sober inhabitants to gain information, or to stable their weary beasts. As they entered the inn-yard, however, they saw a lantern burning in one of the stables; and a drowsy ostler came forth at the sound of horses' feet.

Lord Francis questioned him closely as to whether a carriage with a lady in it had stopped there, or passed by, about two hours before. The man declared that such had not been the case; and the juggler then demanded an account of what visitors had been at the house since evening close.

"Oh! a mighty lot!" answered the man; "but all of them men; some of whom I know, and some I don't."

"Did any of them stay to lodge in the house?" asked the juggler.

"Devil a one," said the ostler; "they all went up—some on foot, some on horseback—to Jem Dawson's tavern, which we call Cold Lock. But now I think of it," he continued, "one of the fellows who ran down for some of our Burgundy wine said there was a lady come there in a coach, and that all the men, who were holding a meeting there, had drunk a prodigious sight of strong waters."

"How long was that ago?" demanded the juggler.

"Why, it might be two hours, or more," said the ostler;

"but I am certain the carriage has not gone through here since; for I have been looking out all night for Lord Es-crick's horses, and they have not been in the stable five minutes."

"Where is this Cold Lock?" demanded Lord Francis, impatiently.

"Go on the high road for a mile and a half, and you can't miss it," said the man; "but if you like to leave your horses here, and take the lane by the church, you will be there half as soon again. You will find no room for the beasts there, I can tell you, for there were more than twenty of them standing in the yard a little while ago, and nowhere else to put them."

The plan he suggested was adopted; and Lord Francis, leaving his horse to the man's care, walked quickly out of the yard. Dick Myrtle and his two companions followed; but the juggler stopped behind for a moment to ask another question, and then hurrying on, joined the young nobleman just as he reached the church.

"There is something very strange in all this," he said. "These night meetings, in such a lonely place, are like the old troublous times. I can hardly think, however, that they have taken your fair Gertrude, with any evil design, to a place where so many people are congregated."

"I cannot tell," said Lord Francis; "I can form no judgment in this dark affair. Whether her father have really sent for her, as you say he is certainly in England, but told the servant to name Amblecombe, when he is in truth at Morrington, in order to guard against discovery; or whether it be all a scheme of Alcester's, I can form no idea."

"It is no scheme of Alcester's," replied the juggler, laying his hand upon the young lord's arm; "but let us think of what we are going to do. Should you find your cousin really implicated in this transaction the consequences may be serious; and, I beseech you, do not give way to hasty indignation; but remember, that never having seen Gertrude unless in her mere childhood, he is ignorant of her name and station. However, it is as well to be prepared, and we must not forget that we are going amongst a number of persons assembled for purposes which we do not know, and under circumstances of a very doubtful character. Let us, therefore, be upon our guard, and approach the house quietly. Are these good men with you armed?"

The last words were spoken in a loud tone, and Dick Myrtle answered, "I have my sword, which is enough for me. Green and Spillman have pistols in their pockets."

"Well, we must do the best we can," said the juggler;

"but look there! Is not that a man creeping along under the hedge?"

They had now reached a spot where the lane, which cut off a long angle of the road, opened out upon the public highway. The moon was now well up, and shining bright over the wild half-cultivated country round; and Lord Francis de Vipont clearly saw the figure to which his companion pointed. The man was evidently doing what is called skulking; in other words, creeping along under the hedge, as if approaching secretly a house which, standing alone on the hedge of a gentle but very extensive slope, commanded a view of the whole country to the north, south, and east.

"It is some one thrown out to watch," said Lord Francis, pausing near the mouth of the lane; "I do not think he sees us. If we could catch him we might obtain all the information we want. Dick, do you not think you could turn that fellow?"

"In a minute, my lord," replied Dick Myrtle. "Draw a little back in the lane, and you, Spilman, dart out upon him, when I cut him off from the house." Thus saying, he retreated a short distance down the descent, then vaulted over the hedge, and, with bent head, ran across a field towards the house. The man upon the road heard the sound of rapid steps and stopped for a moment to listen, but the next instant he saw Dick appearing between him and the house, and, running back towards the lane, he was stopped and collared by Spilman.

The captive was shaking terribly when the rest of the party came up, confirming, by his evident terror, the view which had been expressed by the juggler and Lord Francis de Vipont of the illegality of the meeting which was taking place at the house before them.

"Do not be afraid, my good man," said the young nobleman; "we intend you no harm. Only answer a few simple questions honestly, and you shall go safe; but do not attempt to prevaricate, or you may have different treatment."

"I will answer truly, on my salvation," replied the man, who was a reverend-looking personage, well advanced in years; "I have nothing to conceal."

"Then tell me," said the juggler, interposing, with a sign to Lord Francis, "who is there at Cold Lock at this moment?"

"There is William, Lord Russell," answered the man, "and Colonel Algernon Sydney, and their servants—some nine of them."

"And who else?" demanded the juggler, sternly.

"There is the Lord Howard of Escrick just arrived," replied their prisoner; "and that is all."

"If our information be correct there are many more," said the juggler: "some thirty men at least. Remember, my good man, you run a terrible risk."

"The others have been gone these two hours," answered the man; "it is true as I hope for salvation."

"But what became of the coach which drove up an hour or two ago?" demanded Lord Francis, unable to restrain his impatience; "and who was in it?"

The man always took a few seconds to consider a question before he answered it, as if he did not at once understand it. "Oh, the coach," he said, "it has been gone an hour and a half. Besides, it brought nothing but a lady and a servant. They took the Illington road when they went; but I did not ask where they were going. They went just before Lord Russell came, and he has had time to take his first sleep since."

"Can his story be depended on?" asked Lord Francis, turning to his companions.

"I should think in some degree," replied the juggler, in a low voice; "but we had better see further, at all events—keep him here my men!—let us go on with Myrtle. If we should find the house not vacant of these gentry, who have been meeting there, your ears shall be slit, my friend, when we come back—I do not understand why you were skulking here under the hedge when many more guests might be expected."

"I know nothing of meetings and guests, sir," answered the prisoner; "all I know is, that there were a number of gentlemen at the house some time ago, and that now they are gone. You will find it as I say."

Without waiting to question him further, the juggler and Lord Francis de Vipont walked quickly on towards the house, which was built in the form of a cross, with one large limb extending to the verge of the road, having the principal door in the angle formed by it and the other limb. As the party passed along before the windows which looked upon the highway, the sound of voices speaking was heard, and as they turned the corner they saw three men. One, whose appearance betokened a man of high station, a little in advance of the two others, who seemed to be servants, was conversing with some one at a window of the inn, and evidently expostulating vehemently with the other on his refusing to open the door. "I tell you, sir, I have my orders," said the man above. "Sir John Armstrong has been gone these two

hours, and there is nobody here but Lord Russell and Colonel Sydney."

"Well, tell them I am here," said the gentleman below.

"No, that I won't!" answered the man. "I should only get cudgelled for my pains." And he shut the window.

"That is sufficient, I think, for our chief object," said the juggler to his companion; "but I have a lesson to give to that good lord there. Take care that his men do not interfere."

"In Heaven's name! think what you are about to do," said Lord Francis, aloud. "Remember the risk."

"No risk at all," replied his companion, advancing towards the gentleman, who had turned at the sound of voices so near. "Now, my Lord Howard of Escrick," continued the juggler, "let me have the honour of telling your lordship that you are a coward and a villain; for no one who was not both would set on a single man with six or seven. Walk out here into the moonlight, and I will teach you better manners. Come, draw your sword."

"What, to fight a mountebank and a cheat!" cried Lord Howard.

"Did I not say he was a coward?" exclaimed the juggler, drawing his weapon. "Well, then, I will chastise you where you stand."

"Keep back, knaves!" cried Lord Francis, seeing the two men advancing behind Lord Howard, with their hands upon their swords. "Keep back, or you and he will fare worse."

As he spoke, he and Dick Myrtle interposed between Lord Howard and his men, and the juggler struck the peer a blow on the face, demanding, "Now, will you draw your sword?"

"To punish a knave's insolence," cried Lord Howard of Escrick, plucking his weapon from its sheath, and making a furious lunge at the juggler. "Sa! sa!"

The juggler laughed right merrily, parried the lunge, closed with his adversary, and disarmed him in a moment. "Now I will show you," he cried, as that nobleman stood confused before him, "how a man's sword should be treated who disgraces his high lineage by taking odds against any man, be he gentle or simple:" and sheathing his own weapon, he broke that of Lord Howard over his knee, and threw the two pieces on the grass.

In the meanwhile, the two followers of the vanquished man had been kept in check by Francis de Vipont and his companion; but the young nobleman was surprised to see Dick Myrtle, after a moment's consideration, walk up to one of their opponents, and say to him, in a familiar tone, "Why, Keat-

ing, man! Nay, turn not away; for you are discovered. Take my advice, and think twice what you are about."

"Come, Lord Francis, come!" cried the voice of the juggler, whose brief combat with Lord Howard was already over. "Let us go and pursue our inquiries further. It is evident that we are here thrown out."

"Who was that you spoke to, Dick Myrtle?" asked Lord Francis, as they followed the juggler.

"That is Keating, a merchant and drysalter, of London," replied Dick. "He used often to be down on his business matters in my father's time; but he talked as much treason as traffic; and now he is disguised as yon lord's lacquey. Well-a-day! They are brewing evil, all those men, depend upon it."

As he thus spoke, they rejoined the juggler, and pursued their way to the spot where Spilman and Green were still keeping guard over the man whom they had caught. Some further inquiries were made concerning the carriage, but the prisoner persisted in the tale he had before told, and they let him go. They then walked back to Morrington.

"The asses!" said Preston, Sir Frederick Beltingham's servant, to himself, as soon as they had taken their hands off his collar and departed; "they asked after the carriage, and it is gone, sure enough; but they neither asked after Mistress Gertrude nor Master Preston. Well, men are great fools; but I will not be so great a one as to remain here any longer, and risk having my ears cropped."

CHAPTER XIX.

EXACTLY in proportion as pleasures are artificial, man wearies of them. To be durable, they must be those of nature. We lose not our delight in some of the arts indeed, because they are either representations of nature, such as painting and sculpture, or the sweetest tones of nature's ever varying voice, such as poetry and music. But it is the face of nature herself which offers the only undying enjoyment upon earth. Ever, ever appealing to the heart, and telling with a deep mysterious voice of God's goodness and excellence, she awakens imagination to soar up with the wings of the lark, and sing that song of praise which is to be eternal. Not in the beauty of forms or colours lies the charm alone, not in the varied woods or shining streams, or blue mountains; not in the towering cliff or sloping hill, or wavy valley, or winding river, but in the mysterious sense of God in all, is the deep sublime of nature's loveliness. How beautiful is the shining of the sun! How unalterable the pleasure it affords!

Morning after morning do I see it spread the glories of day over the firmament, and many have been the strange, the happy, the hopeful, the sad, the solemn circumstances in which it has risen for me in life. Yet never have I felt the sight come with weariness, never has it been aught but lovely to my eyes. Ever, ever speaking good in a sweet tongue, it has counselled rejoicing, or peace, or hope, or resignation.

The sky was gray when the horses of Francis de Vipont and three of his companions stood before the inn door at Morrington, and ere they put foot in stirrup, there was the purple glory of the morning over head. Severe fatigue had made the young nobleman sleep, but he woke with a start and a feeling of self-reproach that he had closed his eyes at all, while ignorant of the fate of Gertrude. The juggler had been gone more than an hour, and though the two men Green and Spilman were still asleep when Lord Francis descended to the court, Dick Myrtle was up and examining his horse's feet, and the others made no long toilet before they were ready. When they were on horseback, however, Lord Francis bade Dick Myrtle good-by, with many thanks; and though the latter pressed hard to accompany him further, the young nobleman would not allow it, telling him that he had reasons of importance for wishing to proceed alone. Nor in this assertion did he say aught but truth, for he had determined to ride over at once to Amblecombe, and ascertain whether Sir William Ellerton was really there, and he judged it dangerous to trust the secret of the exile's return to his native country to any one.

He went but to meet fresh disappointment. There was in reality no inn at Amblecombe, a mere village in a little-frequented country; but on inquiring where he could put up his horse and get some refreshment, he was directed by some of the peasantry to a brewer's, with the additional information that a strange gentleman had been lodging there for several days, and had fared well. By the brewer, the young nobleman was hospitably received, the only condition of welcome being, apparently, that he should show favour to the beer of the house; but the moment Lord Francis demanded intelligence of his lodger, the good man shrank back into himself, and it was with difficulty he was induced to admit, that he had during four days entertained as an inmate such a gentleman as his visitor described, and to add that his guest had departed that morning before daybreak, after having received a letter from Morrington. No carriage, and no lady, he said, had come thither on the preceding night, and he demanded sagely, "How the fiend could a coach get here with such roads? It is as much as my waggons can do to roll about."

The news, however, was so far satisfactory, that it led the lover mistakenly to suppose that Gertrude was in immediate communication with her father, and that it was under his directions she guided her course. He was grieved, nevertheless, to have lost sight of her again, and the short moment of happiness he had enjoyed a few evenings before only served to render the impression of their separation more sad, as he rode homeward.

But it is not the course of Lord Francis de Vipont that I intend to trace in this chapter. It is with honest Dick Myrtle, on the contrary, I have to do, although he may seem a very inferior personage. Setting out from Morington at the same time as his noble friend, he directed his course homeward, with a strong determination of ruining some poor unsuspecting trout before the day was too old for the sport. A certain degree of restraint, which the presence of a man of superior rank had cast upon him, was now thrown off again, and a touch of gravity, which the consciousness that his companion was suffering from some great anxiety had produced, vanished likewise. Dick Myrtle had no cares of his own, his bosom was the casket of a very light heart, and as far as he rode on with his two companions, he gave way to his gay humour but the more for the temporary check it had received.

"Well, Johnny, why so double dull?" he said. "Because the young lord has not given you what you expected for your long ride? Why there must be two or three inches off your buff breeches, and those new ones, too.—'T is right that you should be paid for your leather, if not for time and trouble."

"No, Master Myrtle," answered dull Johnny Green; "it is neither for leather, time, nor trouble, I care; and that you know, I think."

"Well, then, what makes you so heavy, John?" inquired Dick Myrtle. "Is it that you think the precentor's cat has died of the ague during your absence, on account of that bit of psalmody which he arranged and you copied out? or that you suspect the parson's ass has died of the brain fever? or will little black-eyed Nancy, the grocer's daughter, pout when you go home, that you have been a whole day without buying half an ounce of candy?"

"Neither one nor t' other, sir," said Johnny Green. "The young lord will pay like a prince, as he always does, and if he does not, it is no great matter, and the cat and the ass must get well again, if they are sick, or send for you, as you are a great ass doctor; and Nancy must learn betimes not to pout, lest she should be pouted at hereafter. No—I was thinking, Master Myrtle, what a thing it is that the young lord cannot find the dear young lady anywhere."

“What dear young lady?” cried Dick Myrtle, turning upon him in some surprise. “The man is always dreaming of Nancy, and he calls her a young lady.—Marry! times are changed since the Restoration.”

“Very good, Master Myrtle,” answered John Green, doggedly; “you think me so dull that I cannot see a sparrow on a bush, but you are mistaken there. You pretend not to know who the young lord is running after, and know all the while. If I must speak plain out, I say it is a great pity he cannot find Mistress Gertrude, and I cannot help thinking she has been taken away from the cottage for no good.”

“Mistress Gertrude! What! Mistress Gertrude Ellerton?” cried Dick Myrtle, while the new light which broke upon him brought a look of surprise into his countenance which convinced even dull Johnny Green of his previous ignorance. “I’ll take it upon my salvation the fellow is right, and she is the girl of the cottage we have been hunting after all this time.”

“Right? to be sure I am right,” answered Johnny. “Why did you not know she has been living in the cottage by Malwood, with old dame Hennage, for these two years? You folks who make use of your tongues so much, do not make use of your eyes, it would seem. Why, I have seen her a dozen times, and more.”

“And have not said a word of it to any one, I will wager my nag against a barber’s donkey,” cried Dick Myrtle.

“Certainly have I not,” replied dull Johnny. “Why should I?”

“Nay, that is another story,” exclaimed Myrtle. “So this was Mistress Gertrude at the cottage; and it is her father who is reported to be at Amblescombe. Now I understand it all. They may call you dull, John, but, upon my life! you have more wit than most of us.”

“I use my eyes oftener than I do my tongue,” replied Johnny Green; “that is why I know more that goes on here than most. It is beautiful Mistress Gertrude, and her father, too, the good old gentleman, as sure as there grow cherries on the trees.”

“By my best tops! if I had known or thought of it ten minutes sooner, I would have gone over to Amblescombe, whether or not, Johnny,” cried Dick Myrtle, slapping his thigh in a sort of ecstasy. “What! Sir William down here? He who saved my life when I was a boy, and gave me many a crown afterwards just because he had saved it, and I not see him? I’ll tell you what, lads, I’ll only just ride home and get out my grey pad, put a few things to rights, and some more money in my pocket, and over to Amblescombe, too.”

"You had better not," said Johnny Green.

"And why not, John?" asked Dick Myrtle. "Do you think the law would have hold of me for comforting an outlaw? Never mind that. I have lived well enough with justice all my life to have a tiff with the old lady now, without any bones broke; and where bigger men go first, Johnny, there is always room for little men to follow. But why did you not tell us all this before, you silent mole? Here you say the dear young lady has been amongst us for two years, and you have seen her well nigh every day, and have never said a word."

"Because I didn't know she'd like it," answered Johnny Green; "and for the same reason, Master Myrtle, I think you had better not go to Amblecombe."

"I'll think of it, John," said Myrtle, more composedly; "but you might have told me, my lad. If I had known the young lady was here, I would have watched over her as if she were my own child. Don't I recollect her no higher than the stock of a gun, with the beautiful brown hair all curling round her fair forehead, and her blue eyes looking out from between the black lashes like a catch of the clear sky through a cloud. Ay, they were pleasant days when the Ellertons had their own, and Sir William and his lady walked to church, with a kind word to every one that lined the churchyard path. Those were like the days of Old England; but it is all changed since this man got their land by one knavery or another; and if it were not for the young lord, who has got all the Ellerton spirit in him, I do not know what we should do."

"Ay, he had that from his grandmother," said Spilman. "I have heard she and Sir William's father were brother and sister. I wonder why they hid Mistress Gertrude so, when she was to be married to the young lord, every one said?"

"Perhaps they were afraid the old lord would make away with her," answered John Green.

"Not unlikely," observed Dick Myrtle; "for they say his grant is not quite so sure, and she is the only heir.—I should not wonder if he had lured her away, now."

This suggestion threw a damp upon the spirits of the whole party, and they rode on nearly in silence, till they came to the end of a lane which led, by a short cut, to the house of Dick Myrtle; and, taking leave of his two companions, he left them to pursue their own course.

He had not gone a hundred yards up the lane, however, when he met a burly sort of personage mounted on a heavy large-boned beast, and followed by a thin man on the counter-part of Rosinante.

"Ha! Master Myrtle, well met," cried the burly personage. "You come from the Morrington side: pray, did you see an elderly gentleman riding along in a skulking sort of way?—but you know him very well, I dare say. We are looking for Sir William, who, as we have information on oath, has broke his ban and come over an outlaw."

"No, your worship, I saw nothing of him," answered Dick Myrtle. "I wish I had."

"Ha, ha! we will soon have him, never fear," cried the justice of the peace. "There are two or three of us out; and my worshipful brother Lee has ridden round by the castle and Ellerton-edge, to work back upon Amblecombe and run him down by Morrington and little Sandridge, so that they will either earth him at Sandridge, or he must break cover and run over here."

Dick Myrtle made no reply, but rode on for a few yards, and then pulled in his horse as soon as the justice was out of sight. "What shall I do?" he asked himself; "they will be at Amblecombe before I could reach it; and if he has left, they will catch him on the road from Morrington. He cannot pass at Sandridge, for the river is still out from the other night's rains. If one could but get him over, up the green laues to Wellstead, and then to the back of Ellerton-park, we might pass through the middle of them, as I have seen a fox on a woody bank creep through a whole pack of hounds. I will get up to Ellerton-edge, and see which way the hunt is taking. Hark! Here come some more of them!"

He spurred on, not to be caught musing; but as he turned the next corner, he came suddenly on a single horseman riding at a quick pace. He was a man of about fifty years of age, tall, well formed, and still powerful. His face was remarkably handsome, fine in all the lines, and of a beautiful oval; but there were long furrows upon it like those of care, and his hair was as white as snow. Nothing could be more simple than his dress, which consisted of a brown coat and cloak, a broad hat with a band of black feathers, wide gray breeches, and large riding boots. A plain sword in a black scabbard, and pistols at his saddle-bow, completed his equipment. His horse was good, but apparently weary; and though it was still going at a rapid pace, its hanging head and falling ears gave indications not to be mistaken of its state.

Dick Myrtle gazed at him for an instant, then rode up to him, raising his hand as a sign to stop. "Back, back!" he cried, catching his bridle, "the hounds are on before upon a false scent. We can yet throw them out. Old Lee must have passed the Edge by this time, and if we get up between

the hills, we shall be at his tail while he thinks you are before him."

- "Honest Dick Myrtle, God reward you!" said Sir William Ellerton; "who is on before?"

"Fat Jones and the skinny constable," replied Dick; "but he told me there were many others out, so come this way, my noble sir, and we will double upon them. If we can get to the Edge, we can see what they are all about, and though they may catch sight of us, they will take us for some of their own people, being two, for they are hunting in couples."

"I will not have it, Dick," answered Sir William; "get you home, my good friend. You are risking your own life."

"I do not leave you, sir, till you are safe," said Dick Myrtle, in a tone of sturdy determination; "but come on. We risk both our lives by staying here. Once past the corner of Illington-lane, and we are pretty safe; but till then, there is every chance of our meeting some one." Thus saying, he forcibly turned Sir William Ellerton's horse, and led it part of the way up the lane at a quick pace. The poor beast seemed to revive a little at the sight of a companion, and the knight himself made no further opposition. About a quarter of a mile further on they passed the end of a lane which branched off to the town of Illington, without having encountered any one, and Dick Myrtle murmured, "Thank God for that!" But a little further on they came upon a countryman, and Sir William's companion paused for an instant to speak with him. "Do not say you have seen me, Bill," he said, "for I have been out a little beyond my right bounds; so hold your tongue if old Jones, or Lee, or any of those fellows ask if some one has passed this way."

"That I will, Master Myrtle," replied the man; and Dick and his companion rode on. Turning away to the left, they directed their course amongst the lanes and hedge-rows, down into the very lowest part of one of the valleys which spread out between the hills, on the slope of which Ellerton Castle was situated, and pursued it up towards the highest points where it rose into upland. Sir William Ellerton, intimately acquainted with the country, at once saw and approved his companion's plan, and but few words were spoken between them till they reached the highest point of the hills beyond the castle, which, with its domain, they left upon the right. There, however, with nothing but downs around them, the haunt of the curlew and wheatear, they paused to breathe their horses and reconnoitre the movements of the enemy. From that great height, which commanded a view over a very

wide extent of country, three parties of mounted men could be seen, with more or less distinctness. One—at a great distance on the right, approaching Morington from the side of Amblecombe, which village itself was hidden by a spur of the hills—would have been hardly distinguishable, had it not been larger than the other two, which were much nearer, and consisted of two men each. But besides these three parties, which, being on open roads, were visible during all the time Sir William and his companion paused, two, or perhaps more,—for it was impossible always to ascertain whether they were the same or others,—appeared and disappeared amongst the wooded lanes to the left.

"They are all out, hunting me like a wild beast," said Sir William Ellerton, bitterly, after he had gazed for a minute or two; "and yet, Dick, there is hardly one of these men whom I have not at some time laid under personal obligation. So fortune changes favour."

"Magistrates are always sad rogues, Sir William," replied Dick Myrtle. "Human nature only wants an excuse to do dirty tricks. A magistrate's excuse is the law; a doctor's his profession; a priest's the church. But how did you find out that they were after you?"

"By nearly falling into Lee's hands," answered Sir William; "as I was riding slowly from Amblecombe, I came to the place where the two roads make so very sharp an angle, and I heard Lee's voice, which I recollected very well, giving directions to his men, which left no earthly doubt of what was his object. Had I been one minute sooner, I should have been in the midst of them; for even then I was only separated from the whole party by a belt of planting forty or fifty yards wide. I then came round on the east side of the hills; but some way further down to the left, I saw some people on horseback whose looks I did not like, and cut across to the west, not knowing that pursuit was busy there too.—But they seem to be drawing this way."

"I cannot think what they are about," replied Dick Myrtle; "they are all running to a point and beating hitherward. They must have some signal amongst themselves, that is clear. Can they have seen us here already? Well, it is no great matter, for we have an hour's start of them and more."

"But my poor horse will give in ere long," said Sir William Ellerton; "and I fear those people whom I saw on the other side of the hills are of the same class as these."

"Then we must take to cover somewhere," answered Dick Myrtle; "we will beat them yet, Sir William Ellerton. Look, look, there is a single man coming over the slopes at a hand canter. On my life! that looks like Lord Francis's

riding. Perhaps the fools take him for you, and are chasing him hither to Ellerton Castle. I'll tell you what we must do sir; just get down between the banks, and ride along the road to the southward. As they are tending this way, we shall be beyond their line before they get up the hills, and can then scamper away at the back of Illington, and to my place, where I can remount you."

"But that will take us close to the castle," said Sir William; "and besides, I fear this horse will break down before we get half the distance."

"We must try at all events," answered Dick, "it seems our best chance; but we will keep away from the castle round by the church. If need be, perhaps I can get you a fresh horse nearer."

"Well, well," said the knight with a sigh, and they turned their horses into a road cut deep into the face of the hill which led them past the park walls of Ellerton Castle, and thence to the old parish church, where some green bowery lanes served to conceal their advance. Sir William spurred on his horse, and tried to keep him up as much as possible; but every moment showed his strength failing; and Dick Myrtle eyed the poor beast's head and limbs with a feeling of apprehension. Just when they had got about fifty yards beyond the churchyard, however, they saw a man on foot running up the lane towards them, and making signs to them with his hand.

Sir William Ellerton drew in his rein suddenly; but Dick Myrtle exclaimed, "It is dull, Johnny Green; you can trust him;" and rode on to meet him.

"You can't come this way," said the man; "I have watched you and for you. Get him back to the church and hide him in the pulpit. Stay, let me have your horses. I will put them away with mine in the old barn."

"But what is it?" exclaimed Dick Myrtle; "who's in the way, John?"

"Straddleforth and Trappum," said John Green; "one on the road, 'tother on 'tother."

"Who can have thus raised the whole country upon me?" exclaimed Sir William, bitterly.

"Three servants of Sir Frederick Beltingham's," replied dull Johnny, approaching and kissing the knight's hand; "but be quick, sir, be quick, and back to the church!"

"It is our best plan, I believe," said Dick Myrtle, springing to the ground; "where are you going to put the horses, John?"

"In the old black barn at the end of Bottomless Lane," answered dull Johnny Green; "I have stabled my own there."

"Well, get them something to eat, there is a good lad," said Dick Myrtle, "and come up and tell us whenever the coast is clear."

"Don't you stir till I come," said dull John, taking the two horses by the bridle; and Sir William Ellerton with his companion, walked rapidly towards the church.

In modern days such a place of refuge would not have been available, for we lock our population out of the house of prayer except at stated periods. But in those days such was not generally the case; the churches that remained from the time of the Rebellion were plain and unadorned in almost all country parishes; and as there was nothing for cupidity to steal, or for the spirit of mischief to injure, the vestry door being shut, the church door was very generally left open. Ellerton church dated from a very early period of English history, and stood detached about a mile from the castle, without any other building near it. The rectory, which served for two parishes, was at the distance of about a mile and a half; and there, in one of the many little basons of the hills, the fine old edifice stood alone, surrounded by its antique yews, showing by its extent and rich decoration, that the part of the country in which it was placed, must have been at one time much more populous and wealthy than it was then. It was calculated for the reception of not less than seven or eight hundred people, though the congregation, as it then existed, seldom exceeded forty or fifty persons. It is probable that at some long preceding period, there had been attached to Ellerton Castle an offset—a cell it was then called—of some religious fraternity, and that this very handsome church in so lonely a spot, owed its erection to the good brothers. It was in fact built upon the model of an abbey church, with aisles, a nave, a transept, and chancel. The rich oak carvings which it once contained were all gone; the stalls of the choir had lighted Anabaptist bonfires in the time of the rebellion, but the stone-work the Puritans had not been able to destroy; for it was of that old and massive style which preceded the lighter and more graceful forms that followed naturally upon the introduction of the pointed arch. Some of the tombs, of which there were many, had been mutilated, and the brass had been dug out of the monumental stones and used for other purposes; but the deep and manifold mouldings were entire, as well as the capitals of the tall pillars; and the rich ornaments of a monk's gallery, running round the nave, of extraordinary lightness and delicacy, considering the period and the style.

The door, as they expected, was found open; and when Sir William Ellerton and his companion entered, Dick Myrtle

was about to fasten it with a great wooden bar which lay against the stone-work at the side, but Sir William Ellerton stopped him, saying, "No, it might excite suspicion. I know a place where we can be safe. How often and in what different circumstances have I trod this church! To that font was I carried an infant; on these stones have I played as a boy; to that door did I follow my father's corpse after Worcester fight; at that altar I stood with my beloved wife; here have I sat and listened to the voice of truth for more than twenty years; and now—without one crime against my king or my country—I return to it after a long exile, as a place of concealment, an outlaw hunted like the beast of the field. But it matters not. Come on—God's will be done!"

Thus saying, he led the way through the aisle, passing the monuments of many of his race—Ellertons and Maldons, with here and there a Vipont—till at length reaching one of the large columns which supported the tower, he entered the small narrow door at its foot, and mounting the narrow spiral staircase which it contained, reached the monk's gallery. Passing along, behind the screen of sculptured stone, he led the way quite to the other end of the church, round which the gallery was also carried, till he at length came to a thick door which had been placed there for some purpose, I know not what; perhaps to separate nuns from friars. It was open, and as soon as Dick Myrtle had passed, Sir William closed it, and shot the round iron bolt with which the door was furnished. A little further on there was a stone bench, narrow, but yet filling up one-third of the small width of the gallery.

Here Sir William Ellerton seated himself, commanding a view of the whole nave of the church through the openings in the stonework, which, however, screened him and his companion effectually from the sight of any one below. The knight crossed his arms upon his chest, and gazed out in silence, occupied with the many thoughts which such a scene in such circumstances might well arouse. All was silent in the church below, except when now and then a gust of wind made the small panes of glass rattle in their leaden frames. A bird, too, perching itself on an iron bar that ran across one of the open windows, sang a sweet melancholy song for a moment, and then flew away again. The old man bent down his head, and a single tear dropped upon his hand. Dick Myrtle said not a word, but moved away along the gallery to a spot where a small round aperture, pierced through the wall of the church, let in the sunshine in a long stream upon the yellow stone. He gazed out from it for a minute

or two, thinking, "I will not disturb his meditations: they must be sad; but they are too solemn to be troubled."

Shortly after, however, he came back to Sir William's side with a quick step, and whispered, "I can see them coming up slowly past the churchyard gates. There is Straddleforth, and two or three others with him."

"Do you know any of the rest?" asked Sir William, in the same tone.

"Why, I see the Earl and Lady Emmeline on foot," replied Dick Myrtle. "The old justice was just riding up to them."

Sir William's brow contracted, and his cheek turned pale with strong emotion. "Then he has had nothing to do with this sharp pursuit," said the old knight, without naming him he spoke of. "Thank God for that! He has enough to answer for. Think you they will search the church, Myrtle?"

"Oh, no," answered Dick. "Men don't look for rabbits in foxes' holes."

"If they do, I shall regret you are with me," said Sir William; "for methinks, if I were alone, I could stand at bay here, and punish some of the treacherous and ungrateful."

"Hush!" rejoined Dick Myrtle: "they are coming in. I see a shadow on the pavement."

The next instant steps were heard; and, moving slowly forward, appeared the Earl of Virepont, with Emmeline hanging on his arm, and two or three men following, of whom, one was at once recognised by the eyes above as Justice Straddleforth, a country gentleman of no very ancient origin, and no very high abilities.

"I tell you, sir," said the Earl aloud, "that there is no chance of his being here. This is all ridiculous. I doubt that he is in the country at all."

"We have information upon oath, my lord," replied the justice, bowing almost to the ground; "and your lordship knows I must do my duty; so I will just make a search—a very little search. We shall not disturb your lordship much."

"Search, if you please," answered the Earl, in an impatient tone; "but whatever you do, make haste, for I have already told you this is a solemn day in my family, and I would be alone."

"Spread out there, my men, spread out there," said the justice. "Look behind all the pillars and the tombs; see if the vestry door is shut. Where does the door in the pillar lead to, I wonder?"

"To a place," said the Earl, bitterly, "frequented, in former times, by fat and foolish hypocrites, who cheated the people on specious pretences, furnished to them by wiser heads than their own. You had better go up there yourself."

"So I will, so I will," said the justice, with a stupid smile; "pardon me for turning my back upon you, my lord."

"We must stop him from seeing through the keyhole," whispered Dick Myrtle to Sir William Ellerton, and creeping up to the door, keeping the while as far back as possible, he put his hand upon the lock. A long period of suspense followed; for the pursy justice mounted the stairs but slowly, and then paused at the top to take breath. At length his step was heard coming along, slow footfall after footfall, till he reached the angle of the church where the gallery turned. There he stopped, and looked along; but luckily that side was in shadow, no light finding its way in, but that which stole faintly through the stone-work, reflected from the opposite walls. The old door did not differ much in colour from the rest of the building; and, saying aloud, "Oh, it ends there," the justice, who was weary, turned himself round and retraced his steps. In a minute or two after, he was seen in the body of the church, bowing low to the peer, who, with a haughty inclination of the head, dismissed him and his followers, and remained alone in the church with Lady Emmeline.

The first words which the Earl spoke to his daughter were not heard by those in the monk's gallery above; for the sound of the retreating steps of the magistrate and his party, their loud tongues, and the noise of their horses' feet, drowned what otherwise would have been distinct. A moment or two after, however, Emmeline was heard to reply, "I hope it will be so, my father. It would be terrible, indeed, were he to be taken on these lands on the anniversary of my mother's death."

"It would," said the Earl, with stern solemnity; "God grant he may escape!"

Emmeline gazed in her father's face earnestly, and then said, "Can we take no measures to ensure his escape?"

"Hush!" cried the Earl; "what do you tempt me to, girl? Would you have me set at nought the laws of my country?"

But Emmeline was not to be so rebuffed. "When the laws, my father," she answered, "are made the means of oppression and the instruments of injustice, by their evident misadministration, instead of the stronghold of right and the shield of the honest, methinks every man is entitled to use whatever power he has, to frustrate their misdirected blow."

"Then instead of the law being judge of all, each man would be judge of the law," replied the Earl.

"No, not of the law, but of those who administer it," said the lady; "and, do what he will, each man is so more or less. Does a man know himself innocent, though condemned by a prejudiced or corrupted jury and an unrighteous judge, can any one say he does wrong to labour, by all means, to escape the execution of his sentence? Can any one accuse his relations or his friends of crime in aiding him, if they are convinced of the falshood of the charge, and the iniquity of the court? Can any honest man in all the world be blamed for attempting to prevent a gross act of tyranny and injustice being committed in the name of law?"

"You argue like a girl," said the Earl, turning away; but Emmeline held him gently by the arm, asking, "Who has the greatest respect for the law, my father, he who upholds whatever is most opposite to its principles and most repugnant to its spirit, because a corrupt court has pronounced it; or he who endeavours, by every means, to keep its administration pure and holy, and to prevent those acts from being committed under its shadow, which will stain the pages of its annals with everlasting blots? I ask you, my father, whether you do not know our cousin, Sir William Ellerton, to be innocent of all that was laid to his charge? I ask you, if your heart and conscience are not profoundly convinced that there was not one particle of truth in the charges against him; if you are not aware that all which appeared before the Privy Council was the result of a foul conspiracy between the infamous Oates and the little less infamous Beltingham, who made a tool of him who made tools of so many; and if so, I beseech, I entreat, I adjure you, by the memory of her who never recovered those sad days, if you would sleep as peacefully as she sleeps beneath that marble, to do something to save him who has been already terribly wronged."

The Earl started and turned sharply round; but Emmeline's beautiful eyes were fixed upon him, and remained so, with no expression of reproach, with no look of authority or assumption; but calm, and grave, and earnest, full of strong conviction, sorrowful, not stern. They wavered not for an instant, the eyelids did not wink; it seemed as if the intensity of her feelings had taken from her the power of closing them; and the Earl, turning away with a quivering lip and downcast eye, leaned for support upon the tomb which stood near, and to which she still pointed.

"What would you have me do?" he murmured; "what would you have me do?"

"Save him from these men," answered Emmeline; "that is the first step."

"Impossible!" cried the Earl; "I have no power, girl."

"In one thing, at least, you have power," said the lady; "I hear that if he be taken, he can be executed without form of trial—within twenty-four hours."

"Not without a warrant," replied her father.

"And what can prevent it?" asked Emmeline; "are they punishable by any law?—he is outlawed—the sheriff is his old enemy—will any adequate punishment follow, if, without a warrant, he puts him to death?"

"None that I know of, indeed," answered Lord Virepont.

"Then, you are lieutenant of the county," said Emmeline; "you will interfere at once—you will warn the sheriff, at his peril, not to proceed, should Sir William be taken, till the king's pleasure is known. Oh, my father, you will, you will!"

"I will," replied the Earl, raising his head, "I will, Emmeline. God knows I bear no enmity towards him, though he raised his hand against my life, and would have taken it, too, had not the turf of his own park betrayed him."

"All things betrayed him then," said Emmeline, forgetting whom she spoke to in the depth of her own emotions; and then, suddenly remembering the weight of her words, as she saw her father's check grow deadly pale, she cast herself upon his bosom, exclaiming, "Forgive me, oh, forgive me. I thought not of what I said."

"My own child!" repeated the Earl, with a wandering eye; "my own child!"

"Hear me, hear me," said Emmeline; "I know that you have it always in your power to make restitution—I am sure you will, if ever he is restored to——"

"No, no, no!" cried the Earl, with a look of fury; "not if the voice of both my ungrateful children be daily added to the tortures of my own heart—to the doubts, I would say—to the hesitations, and fears, and—but I forget myself. All this is in vain. I am the judge of my own actions, the ruler of my own conduct. I will not be taught and tutored like a child—now upbraided, now led by soft suggestion. No more of this, Lady Emmeline. Learn better to fulfil your own duties to your father, before you pretend to teach him his."

"I have asked your pardon, my father," said Emmeline, the eager energy with which she had been speaking, passing away; "I spoke rashly and unguardedly, and I grieve sincerely for it. It is not usual for me so to forget; and I trust that you will forgive it."

The Earl, however, turned and left the church, his daughter following a step behind.

CHAPTER XX.

"Now God's blessing on thee, dear Emmeline, for a noble and true-hearted girl!" said Sir William Ellerton, as soon as the steps of the Earl and his daughter sank away into silence. "I call Heaven to witness, that if ever the time should come, in the many mutations of earthly things, when I shall have power to avenge me for the wrong that has been done me, I will forbear for thy sake."

"Ay, Sir William, and the old man is sorry for what he has done, too, I can see that plain enough," said Dick Myrtle. But Sir William did not at once agree with him; for there was, perhaps, a little not unnatural prejudice in the mind of the wronged man, which came before his eyes like a yellow veil, and tinged all the actions of the Earl with a colour not their own.

"I do not see it, Richard," he answered; "did you not hear his angry words to his own bright excellent child, when she mentioned but the name of justice and restitution?"

"That may be, sir," replied Dick Myrtle; "and yet he be very sorry, too. It is a different thing never to do a wrong thing, and to repair it when it is done—a very different thing to be sorry for having taken what does not belong to us, and to restore it after we have got it. Besides, a man is rarely angry to have any of his acts talked about, unless he feels at heart that they were evil. It is because the pretty Lady Emmeline takes part with his conscience against his inclination, that he is angry with her. If conscience had not been talking to him about the same things, he would not have been angry at all."

"There is some philosophy in that," said Sir William Ellerton.

"Not much philosophy, sir," replied Dick; "but just a little experience. I have seen what others do and feel, and I know what I do and feel myself. It must have hit hard, what she said, too—especially to-day; for I take it this is the day of the poor Countess's death. It was about this time of the year I recollect, and we all know that she never held up her head after that business of the plot. I remember they said, she never half liked to come to this church, for she told the parson she thought all the people were looking at her as she passed, and saying in their hearts that she had got what was not her own. Poor thing! it broke her heart."

which, if it was a proud one, as many folks thought, was a noble one, nevertheless."

Sir William Ellerton mused for several minutes, and then turning to his companion, he shook him by the hand, saying, "Well, Richard, you may perhaps be right; but it is time for you, my good friend, to go. They have all passed on, and indeed, even if you met any of them, you have nothing to fear, unless I be with you. Go then, and a thousand thanks go with you for all that you have done."

"No, Sir William, no," replied Myrtle, sturdily; "I have spoken a word that I will keep. I do not leave you till I see you in safety, and that I suppose will be in London town. We must wait here till nightfall, for that will be the only safe time to travel; and all I wish is, that I could get something for us both to eat, for I have not tasted bit or sup since last night at nine or ten."

Notwithstanding the determined tone in which he spoke, his resolution of accompanying Sir William on his way to London did not pass without many an objection. But in vain Sir William endeavoured to show that he should pass with less observation if he were alone than in company with any one; Dick Myrtle could not be persuaded that he would not be the better for a companion on the road; and after much debate he carried his point.

When this discussion was over, they both fell into silence, broken only from time to time by a word concerning the state of the country. Dick Myrtle, indeed, spoke very little—less than was his custom; for his mind was uneasy upon other points besides those affecting the immediate fate of Sir William Ellerton. He considered and reconsidered all the facts concerning Gertrude of which he had any knowledge; and he asked himself, again and again, if he should tell his companion in concealment what he had learned, and what he had divined of her actual uncertain fate. He remembered, however, that Sir William would have no power to aid her, and judged that any communication on the subject would only either add uselessly to the grief and anxiety of her father, or induce him to make some effort to discover and protect her, which might end in his own capture and death. He remained silent then for nearly an hour, only answering Sir William's questions, and giving him that hopeful view of the immense preponderance of the Tory party in the country, which was calculated to raise his expectation of obtaining the reversal of his outlawry.

At length they saw, by the light which suddenly streamed across the pavement of the church, that the door which had been closed after the Earl's departure, was opened again,

and the next moment they beheld through the stone-work the figure of John Green enter with a basket on his arm, and look cautiously around. No one followed, and after having watched him for a moment or two as he examined the church, evidently in search of them, Dick Myrtle ventured to speak to him from above, and direct him to come up.

"I have brought you some bread and cheese, and some beer," said Johnny Green, as soon as the door was opened, and he stood beside them in the monks' gallery.

"Thank you heartily, John," replied Dick Myrtle; "score it to me, and double the score, for my stomach feels as if hunger had worn a hole in it."

Sir William Ellerton thanked him also, but in different terms, and demanded tidings of what was taking place without.

"Oh, you mustn't come out for a long while," said John Green, "for they are all about still; but the funniest thing has taken place. They saw a man riding from Amblecombe at a good round pace, and one galloped after him, and another galloped, and they all tried to keep him in, and to drive his breast against the hills. He rode on hard, and took through the green lanes, turning in and out as if he knew the country every step of it, and that made them all the more think it was your worship, till at length a fellow who comes over from 't other side of the country, and knows not a duck from a gosling, got a turn upon him, and came up and caught him by the collar, never having seen your worship in his born days. So the young man turns round and knocks him off his horse, and then pulls in his rein, and asks him what he means by meddling with his throat. The other hollowed lustily for the justices, and when two or three of them came up, they found the young lord sitting quietly on his horse, but rating their fellow finely for having dared to touch him. I went up, just at the time with an innocent look, and when Lord Francis heard he had been taken for you, sir, he laughed a little, and told them that they would find themselves all mistaken, because you had gone from Amblecombe eight hours, which he knew, because he had been over too late to see you. Then, lord! what a world of apologies the justices did make: but they would not take the young lord's word after all, and are still pottering about, looking for you."

"How did he learn I was at Amblecombe, I wonder," said Sir William Ellerton; in answer to which Johnny Green at once told what Dick Myrtle had studiously concealed, that Lord Francis had gone over to Amblecombe to gain tidings of Gertrude, she having been taken away from her place of refuge in a manner which excited his suspicions. The effect

was not such as Myrtle had anticipated; for although there was much that Sir William Ellerton did not understand in the whole transaction, yet he had the assurance of Gertrude's safety.

"The poor lad is anxious enough, I dare say," he said, after a few moments' consideration, "and I would to heaven that there were any way of quieting his alarm, by letting him know that my dear child is in security."

"Oh, Johnny Green here will take him a message in half an hour," said Dick Myrtle; "and deliver it without any one hearing a word. We two and young Spilman were riding with him all yesterday and part of the night about this very business. But are you quite sure she is safe, sir? I did not tell you all we knew, for fear it should make you uneasy when you could give no help."

"She was quite safe at twelve last night," said Sir William, "and under the protection of Lord Russell—as noble a gentleman as any in all Europe. Here are his own words," and taking out a letter from his pocket, he read—"In case you should hear any alarming reports regarding Gertrude, I add, she is quite safe, and will soon be with one whom you and all men reverence."

"If your worship would just tear that bit off, and let me have it," said Johnny Green, "it would be better than all the messages in the world."

"That will be easily done," answered Sir William Ellerton; and a few minutes after, the good man set out on his message, saying, "I won't come back till all is quite clear, for it would not do to be seen hanging about here too much."

Waiting is always a weary task, but yet the hours flew faster with Dick Myrtle and Sir William Ellerton than either of them had expected. The church did not remain solitary the whole day; a baptism and a funeral took place; and the unseen witnesses found some relief for the tedium of their solitude and forced inactivity, in watching the conduct and demeanor of the persons who attended, the somewhat laborious solemnity of the parson, the heavy indifference of the clerk, and the joy or grief of the relations and friends on the first and last ceremonies of the church, at the commencement and the end of life.

At length a perceptible change came upon the aspect of the day; the shadows of the western columns grew long, and the air gray. Night was evidently coming on; and weary of the narrow space to which he was confined, Sir William gladly prepared for departure. The door was unbolted, and moving out to the other end of the monks' gallery, the fugitive and his companion were descending the spiral stairs, and had

nearly reached the bottom, when, to their surprise and consternation, they heard the church door slowly pulled to, and the key turned in the lock. There was not a moment for consideration; the windows of the church were high, they had no possible means of reaching them, and Dick Myrtle, saying, "Stay there, stay there," ran down the remaining steps, darted to the door, and putting his mouth to the key-hole, shouted aloud, "Hallo! Jack Sexton, Jack Sexton! You have locked me in, you dog. Open the door, I am not going to sleep here all night."

The old man, who had charge of the church and the little village of graves that surrounded it, was rather deaf; but still he heard some one calling, and, as the case had occurred before, he divined at once what was the matter. Trudging slowly back, then, he opened the door, with a grin upon his countenance; and as soon as he saw Dick Myrtle, who was known far and wide through the country, he was beginning to comment on Dick's probable situation with a laugh and a jest. The other, however, affecting high indignation, gave him a violent push from the door, exclaiming, "You stupid old fool, you should look in the church before you close it! Were it a woman you shut in, you might frighten her to death."

Then pulling to the door with his own hands, he pretended to lock it with an impatient gesture, and gave the old man the key, saying, "There, go along, you old fool! If you had kept me in all night, I think somebody else would have had to dig the next grave for you."

"Ah, Master Myrtle," said the sexton, still laughing, "you are a little angry; but the next time I lock you in you shall not come out so soon, depend upon it. You sha'n't be in the way of making graves for other men, whatever you do for yourself. I have a snug place in the corner there for a youth like you, where you would rot away quite comfortably in a couple of years, I warrant. But I dare say you would rather fatten the worms of Wincombe,—that is your parish, isn't it?—and the red friends of the mattock should not be defrauded of their dues in any parish."

"Nor the old crows either, I suppose you would say," answered Dick Myrtle, pushing him along by the shoulders. "But get you along for a graceless old rogue, who shuts men in to die of cold and starvation, when they just come to take a look at the tombs." Thus saying, he wished him good-night, and hurried along the path which led along towards the barn, where the horses had been placed. There he found dull Johnny Green sound asleep on some straw, and rousing

him they quickly saddled the three beasts, and returned to within about a hundred yards of the church.

The horses were by this time refreshed with a whole day's rest and plenty of provender, and in a few minutes more, Sir William Ellerton was in the saddle, and away with his two companions in the direction of London.

"We must do fifty miles to-night, Sir William," said Dick Myrtle; "so, as soon as we have got beyond Wincombe, we had better slacken our speed, and drop Johnny Green here at his house."

"I shall ride the night out with you," said Johnny Green, abruptly; "for we might have a knock or two yet. But I have not told your worship yet, how I sped with the note. I went up to the castle, as I knew that the young lord had returned; and I sent up word by one of his own men that I wanted to speak with him about the hawk he had given me to reclaim. He came in a moment, and seemed very thankful for the news. He asked me, however, who it came from, and pressed me hard to tell. As I thought there could be no harm in it, I let him know it was you. I would not tell him, however, where you were, all he could say; for I knew he would be up here in a minute, and that might lead to mischief. He asked much about your worship, however, and whether you were looking well or ill. I told him you were a great deal aged since I saw you—full ten years older like."

"Ah! sorrow triples time," said Sir William Ellerton, with a sigh; and riding on their way, they were soon beyond the circle within which they expected the greatest danger to lie. About ten miles further they paused at one of the packman's inns, very common at that period, to water their horses, and then proceeded on their way towards London.

Shortly after daybreak they entered a small county town, in the market-place of which they found a great number of stalls and booths, prepared for the fair which was to be held in that place after closing at Illington. The horses were now incapable of going further without rest; and after some consultation, it was agreed that it would be better for Sir William Ellerton to remain in a private room at the inn all day, and at nightfall to go on with Dick Myrtle to London, while Johnny Green returned to his household gods.

Fatigued with want of sleep, and long exertion, Sir William Ellerton, after obtaining some refreshment, lay down to rest, and for several hours obtained calm and quiet slumber. He was roused, however, by the sound of drums and trumpets, announcing the formal opening of the fair at noon; and

rising, he approached the casement, near which his two companions were still seated, just awakening from the heavy sleep which they had enjoyed upon the sunny window-seat. Very much the same sight presented itself which I have before described at Illington; only, in this instance, as the fair was nearer London, there were more booths of mountebanks, conjurers, and toymen; more streamers, flags, and ribbons, and fewer stalls for the sale of articles of real necessity.

The multitude of visitors to the fair was already great; but perfect order and propriety prevailed, as cheerful merriment had not yet deviated into excess. A few minutes after, however, an unusual degree of bustle was perceptible in the crowd; and from the town-house, opposite to the inn, came forth the mayor and corporation in their robes, with a beadle bearing a mace before them. At the same time acclamations, not very distant, were heard, and before the municipal body could traverse the market-place, a splendid cavalcade entered, consisting of nearly a hundred horsemen, accompanied by a crowd of boys shouting as lustily as their little lungs could afford. The party was splendidly dressed, and divided into two equal bodies, with a small space between them, in the midst of which, riding alone upon a magnificent charger, appeared a remarkably handsome young man, in the most gorgeous apparel, bowing low even to the very children, who gazed and shouted in wondrous admiration of his finery.

"Monmouth, Monmouth!" was the general cry; "Monmouth, and no York!" But several persons were seen standing in the crowd with their arms folded on their breasts; and Dick Myrtle, turning to Sir William Ellerton, remarked, "All this gladness is not to be trusted, sir, and that the good Duke will find some day, that the tide sets strong the other way; and yet he and his friends cannot perceive it."

Sir William Ellerton mused; for every sign of the popular feeling was of importance to him; and the gratulations given to one so thoroughly identified with the party to which he himself, and so many others, had been made a sacrifice, induced him to fear that the representations of a reaction having taken place, upon which he had ventured to return to his native land, had been premature, if not altogether unfounded.

The excitement of the Duke's reception lasted about twenty minutes; the mayor and corporation met him, and welcomed him with florid gratulations, muskets were brought and fired in his honour, boughs of laurel were presented to him, and when the farce of popularity had passed through one act, Monmouth and his party rode on in the same order in which they came.

At a later hour of the day,—it was somewhat past four,—a carriage drawn by six horses, and followed by eight or ten mounted servants, passed round the market-place and out at the other side. Sir William Ellerton saw it in its progress; and the colours of the liveries made him eye it eagerly; but a slight shower was falling, the glasses were closed, and he could see nothing but part of a laced cloak, and a hat seemingly carried on the knee.

"Those are the Russell colours," he said, in a low tone, as if speaking to himself; "perhaps my child is there." What a strange sensation passed through his heart as he thus thought—strange and most sweet, a yearning longing not to be described, which is balmy, even when, as in his case, it cannot be gratified. There is nothing like parental love in a heart susceptible of deep devotion. All other feelings have more or less of earth in them; this is the pure light from heaven.

Sir William Ellerton stood and gazed as long as the carriage was in sight; and after it was gone, he stood there still, buried in profound thoughts. He took a resolution at that moment, never to be far absent from his child again—whatever might be the object to be obtained by her stay at a distance, to call her to him. The rest of the day passed without incident; and as soon as the sun had set, Sir William and Dick Myrtle mounted their horses, and rode on to London.

They entered the great metropolis by the eastern side, when a part, at least, of the bustle of the day was over; but, at that period, the city was a very different place from that which it is at present. It was then a place of habitation, not of mere business. The great merchant, the wealthy tradesman, did not consider it then absolutely necessary, either to health or dignity, to dwell beyond the odour of his merchandise; and the small shopkeeper would as soon have thought of realising or recalling the terrestrial-paradise, as of inhabiting a suburban villa, with a green and hollyhocks before the door. The great fire, indeed, had driven many families into the country for refuge; and some few, perhaps, had retained the houses which they had then bought or hired; but the great majority of the citizens lived in the city, and it had a society of its own, not unfrequently mingled in by the society of the Court itself. With mornings given up to business, it was natural that the evenings should be given up to pleasure or amusement; and when Sir William and his companion entered the more-frequented streets, lanterns were flitting about, hackney coaches and carriages were rolling hither and thither, and many a sedan chair with a link before it, burdened the stout arms of the sturdy chairmen. Apprentices,

maid-servants, and sempstresses, thronged the streets; and loving couples walked soberly homewards, after having passed the evening with neighbour or friend.

"Have you thought of an inn, sir?" asked Dick Myrtle, as with prudent precaution they advanced steadily along Cheap.

"No, my good friend," replied Sir William; "I am directed to the house of a man named Shepherd, where I am told I shall find accommodations prepared for me. I remember him well, for he is a great wine-merchant, and I have bought wine of him in former days. He is not indeed the man I should have chosen for my host, although I believe him to be honest and trustworthy; but he was a mere creature of Lord Shaftesbury, who showed himself for many years my bitterest enemy."

"Then I hope you trust him on good grounds now," said Dick Myrtle; "I should think the pupil of a fox would not want cunning."

"Lord Russell answers for him," replied the knight; "assures me that from various circumstances I shall find greater security there than anywhere else."

"Then he is safe enough," said Dick Myrtle; "we all know that Lord Russell's word is good to enemy or friend; but you must lead the way, sir, for I know it not."

It were vain, after so many years of frequent alterations, to give any account of the course that Sir William Ellerton pursued through the streets of a city, which was even then considered too vast for the size of the country of which it was the capital. There were then, as in our own days, people to prognosticate that evils would ensue from the head having outgrown the body, in as confident a tone as if the science of social economy, still in its infancy, was even then old enough for men to predict with the certainty of experience the result of acts and the progress of institutions.

Innumerable, though crowded into a narrow space, the streets of London presented to the casual visitor the aspect of a great labyrinth, through which it would take years of study to find the way; and such they seemed to the eyes of Dick Myrtle, who, though he had more than once visited the capital before, still retained a feeling of wonder, not un-mixed with awe, at the sight of its vastness.

Sir William Ellerton kept silence, too, from very different feelings. Memories crowded on him, the forms and thoughts of other years peopled the streets anew. There were figures glided amongst the many that passed by him, which no eye could see but his. There were the peace of former days, the bounding hopes of youth, and the proud feeling of honest

security; and the many loved and known, some lost to earth, some to honour, some to friendship; all moving before his eyes and coming back to the gate of memory, like ghosts returning to the habitations they had dwelt in, pale, unsubstantial, yet bearing all the lineaments of life. He maintained a profound silence, then, amidst the ghastly company of thought, till he drew in his rein at the wide doors of a large house in a street, which at that hour was but little frequented. Dick Myrtle sprang to the ground first, saying, "Is it here sir?"

"Ycs," replied, Sir William; "we used to go into the storehouse at that door; but it stood open then, and I see no means of making oneself heard."

"Oh, I will make myself heard," said Dick Myrtle, striking the door hard with his fist. It returned nothing but an empty sound, however, as if he had struck upon an exhausted cask; and saying, "Stay Richard, stay; the premises are very extensive. Perhaps there may be a door round the corner," Sir William Ellerton rode on a little, and then cried, "Here! there is a door here with a light."

Before Dick Myrtle reached him, he had himself dismounted, and rung a bell which hung by the side of one of those large extinguishers with which every house was at one time furnished, for the purpose of putting out the flaming link or torch as soon as its smoky light was no longer required. The door was opened speedily by a man with a canvas apron, and a corkscrew dangling from a string round his waist. To the inquiry if Master Shepherd was within, the janitor gave a doubtful answer, saying he would see, but, at the same time, advising the visitors to go round to the other door.

"Tell him it is the person of whom he had notice," said Sir William; and following the counsel he had received, he went back again to the place where they had at first sought admission in vain. In a few minutes a light gleamed through the two large valves; the unfastening of bolts and bars was heard, and then the figure of a man, whom he well remembered as Shepherd, the wine-merchant, presented itself, with a lamp in his hand. There was nobody else with him; and Shepherd held up the light to see the face of his visitor, where he seemed to find something to surprise him. "Goodness!" he cried, for he would not swear; "Dear me! why, yes, it is—Mr. Fenwick, I do declare—Come in, sir,—very glad to see you—but who is this?—Oh, Mr. Jones, I see now. Here, boys, here! Take Mr. Fenwick's horse, and Mr. Jones's horse, and put them in stalls G. and H. I will show you the way, gentlemen, everything is ready; but my boy did not tell me there were two. That will soon be

remedied, however, no matter for that. This way, gentlemen—very glad to see you—how is your wife, Master Jones?”

“As well as ever,” answered single Dick Myrtle dryly, and giving his horse into the hands of one of the two lads, which came forth at Shepherd’s call, he followed Sir William Ellerton where the other led.

The two large doors—for the valves seemed to deserve that appellation better than that of a folding door—admitted the wayfarers into a vast sort of warehouse, divided at various points by columns of solid brickwork, which seemed the only support afforded to the rooms above, except the exterior walls of the building. The light carried by Shepherd was far too feeble to show a tenth part of the extent of the space; but wherever the beams fell, the roundheads, and flat unmeaning faces of pipes and hogsheads were seen coming forth from the obscurity, like the broad snouts of Hippopotami, along the banks of an African river.

Through various turnings in this labyrinth of casks, the wine-merchant led his visitors on, till a narrow flight of wooden steps presented themselves, not in the best preservation; and Dick Myrtle could not help muttering to himself, “I dare say it will be very secure; for no one would come here if they could help it.” The sort of ladder before them was then mounted by Shepherd himself, who cautioned them as they followed, to beware of two of the steps, which he himself pronounced “somewhat rickety;” but when they had passed a small door at the top, a very different scene displayed itself, and they gazed along a passage, lined with carved oak, and very tastefully decorated after the fashion of the day. They were not destined, however, to stop at any one of the several doors which displayed themselves on both hands; but were guided forward by their host to a handsome staircase which led to another and very similar suit of rooms above. Here the passage had several branches, and through one of these, and down half a dozen steps, which apparently led from the building they had first entered, to another somewhat lower and more ancient at the back, Sir William Ellerton and his companion were conducted to the more remote part of the whole premises. There, however, they found a room of large size already prepared for the knight, with every attention to comfort, and even luxury. A piece of tapestry was spread on the floor; two or three beautiful buhl cabinets were placed against the walls; materials for writing appeared on the table; a small fire had been lighted on the wide hearth; and upon the edge of the richly-cur-

tained bed was seen reposing, for the service of the first comer, a snow-white night-cap.

"There is another room here, Mr. Jones," said Shepherd, opening a door to the right, and showing a smaller, but not less comfortable chamber. "Here you are installed, Mr. Fenwick; and Mr. Jones's room shall be ready in a quarter of an hour. In the meanwhile, I will go and get supper ready, and be back directly. You have ridden far and hard to-day, and must be hungry."

"You are aware, I dare say, Shepherd, who I really am," said Sir William. "Your eyes are not old enough to forget me in four years." But the man merely put his finger to his lips, with a grave look, as an injunction to silence; and, having lighted a couple of small lamps, he left them.

CHAPTER XXI.

In a beautiful room, looking upon Southampton Square, sat Rachael Lady Russell, on a fine night in the beginning of the summer of 1683. There, had passed many of the sweetest days of life, blessed with peculiar happiness too soon to have a dark and tragical termination. Happy in domestic love; happy in a husband whose talents and virtues commanded respect and admiration, while his gentle kindness won the most devoted attachment, Lady Russell was still further happy in her own high, firm, and noble heart, filled with true Christian faith, and dignified by the consciousness of rectitude. Few houses have ever been pervaded for long years with such a high and holy calm as that of Lady Russell. Angry passion ventured not there; and her noble husband, though engaged in the fierce contests of the senate, and striving with vigour and eagerness for the advancement of the cause he had espoused, brought none of the fiery spirit of debate back to his own home. Acting upon fixed principles which knew no variation, and always ready to defend them, he cast discussion from his mind the moment it was over, and sank into the sweet and gentle intercourse of domestic life, like a warrior who has sheathed his sword, and lays him down to rest.

The lady was now watching for her lord's return, and watching eagerly; for while he was absent, a part of the sunshine was wanting in her dwelling. I have said eagerly, not anxiously; for she had that strong conviction of the justness of her lord's views, of the soundness of his judgment, of the excellence of his intentions, and of the ever-present superintendence of the Almighty, that she feared not that he would do aught that was rash, or that any evil would befall

him, except through one of those mysterious but wise dispensations, before which, if it occurred, she would be called upon to bow with faith and resignation.

A slight degree of curiosity, too, mingled with her longing to see her husband again; and once more she read over part of a letter which she had received from him an hour or two before, and meditated upon the following words:—"I have found something by the way, very young and very beautiful, which I am bringing home with me, fearing no scandal. I pray you, therefore, my dear wife, to cause an apartment to be prepared for her, and be yourself ready to receive with kindness one who merits it, if virtue have deserving."

"Who can it be?" thought Lady Russell; "I know none in that part of the country who deserves such praise, unless it be Emmeline de Vipont. The man would fain make me jealous, I do believe," she added, aloud; "but it is vain, Russell; I love you too well to be jealous." And it was so; for true love cannot exist without perfect confidence, and jealousy cannot exist with it.

Not long after, she heard in the court the sound of carriage wheels, and horses' feet, and persons speaking; and, if truth must be told, her heart fluttered a little. She rose from her seat, and looked at the door, but did not go out, although she knew her husband was arrived. In a minute after, a step was heard in the antechamber: the known, the loved, the harbingers of joy and tenderness, the step of her husband; and she advanced to meet him. His arms were around her in a moment, and he pressed her warmly to his heart; and then, taking her hand, he turned to some one who followed: "Here, Rachel," he said, "is one who is come, on my assurance, to claim your love and care."

Lady Russell uttered an exclamation of surprise. "Why, surely!" she cried, "it is Gertrude Ellerton, dressed as a peasant girl!"

"Even so, dear lady," replied Gertrude, taking her hand, and kissing it. "Your noble lord was anxious to set out, and would not give me time to change this strange dress; but I knew that vestments cannot veil friendship, and that Gertrude would be as welcome to Lady Russell in the garb of a cottage-maid as in the jewels of a queen."

"To the full, my sweet girl," said Lady Russell, embracing her. "Why, what a time it is since I saw you, Gertrude! You were then but a child; but there is the same dear, open face—the same appealing eyes. I should have known you anywhere in a moment, Gertrude. But you must be weary of journeying through this long day. Will you stay and sup with me and Russell, or will you seek repose at once? for

sleep, methinks, will be the best companion you can have at present. To-morrow you shall tell me all; for I am sure there is much to be told, and I promise you, I will not listen to one word of the tale till it comes from your own lips."

"Though I had more to weary me last night," said Gertrude, "yet I know not why I feel greater fatigue to-day; and, therefore, with your kind permission, I will retire to rest."

Although Lady Russell sent for her own woman to attend upon her young friend, yet she did not fail to accompany her in person to the chamber prepared for her, and left the poor girl almost weeping, with a sense of relief, which, strange and contradictory to say, became almost oppressive.

When she returned to the saloon below, Lady Russell found her husband buried in deep thought,—for him a very unusual mood. It is difficult to say what produced it. Perhaps it might be, that after an absence of ten days, passed, for the greater part, in eager and anxious discussions, all tending to anything but repose, he felt that the calm serene aspect of his own house, and the tranquil spirit of domestic love, afforded a solemn and warning contrast to the scenes which he had just left, and to those which were likely to follow. Moments of yielding softness will fall upon every man. The stern and vigorous voice of public duty cannot always sound in the ear like the voice of the trumpet, calling to battle. The patriot, like the warrior, must have some moments of repose for mind and body, and may well be pardoned if, feeling deeply the blessings of tranquillity and love, he longs that the war were over, and arms himself reluctantly for strife renewed. Suffice it, if he be ready when the drum beats. Lord Russell cast off his thoughtfulness as soon as his wife appeared; a few minutes were given to tenderness and love; and then Lady Russell questioned him as to his journey and its events, whom he had seen, where he had been, what he had done, playfully commanding him to tell her all but politics.

"The politics would form the best half of the tale," beloved," said Lord Russell, with a smile; "but, in truth, I have had so much of them, that I am somewhat weary of the topic, as you may guess, when I tell you that Sydney has been my companion the greater part of the way. He joined me at Salisbury, and we have ridden side-by-side, over one quarter of the country, I believe, till we found the coach again at Wincombe."

"Would he had not been with you," said Lady Russell, thoughtfully. "I somewhat fear him, my friend."

"Nay, there is no cause for fear," said Lord Russell; "a higher-minded, nobler man lives not on earth."

"But rash and vehement beyond discretion," answered his wife. "Ay, Russell, and overbearing too. He is one of the quick and hasty spirits, most dangerous in grave counsels. It seems a fate attending all patriotic enterprises that the wise and the moderate shall be overborne by the imprudent and the excessive, who either force them forward beyond the point where justice and wisdom bids them stop, as in the last king's reign, or else by rashness and intemperance in the previous steps frustrate the best-devised designs, and make many a glorious undertaking perish in the bud, or, like precocious fruit, fall nipped ere it be ripe."

"Fear not, fear not, Rachel," replied Lord Russell, "there is no great enterprise on foot, my love. My object has solely been to ascertain the state of men's minds in England. If more extensive schemes have been entertained, they have been long abandoned, and by me were never seriously adopted. Nevertheless, a limited monarchy is now making such gigantic strides towards arbitrary power, that it behoves every man who loves liberty and his country to see what can be done by just and lawful means to prevent England from falling under despotic rule. What time may bring forth I know not; but it is clear that if corrupted judges and packed juries can be found to take their charters from our cities, and to intimidate by fines all who oppose them, if the monarch refuses to call together the representatives of the people, and is determined to rule without a parliament, depending upon a neighbouring despot for supplies, the dignity of the nation is lost, and her liberty at an end, unless we can find some means of forcing the king to return to a constitutional mode of government. God forbid that one drop of blood should be shed in the endeavour; but, if it must be, I would rather, Rachel, that it should be my own, than transmit to my children, and my children's children, a heritage of slavery."

Lady Russell was silent for a moment. She would fain have said, "And so would I;" but her heart failed her at the words, and she could not utter them. "Did Lord Howard of Escrick join you?" she asked at length. "He was here some four or five days ago inquiring where you were. I saw him myself, and answered his questions as well as I could, though it was with no good will, for I do not love him, Russell."

"Nor I," replied her husband. "I did not meet with him, and am glad it was so, for a worse man I hardly know. I feel when he has been with me as if I had touched something foul, and his sarcastic, discontented spirit is most opposed to true patriotism. It is one of the drops of bitter in my cup."

that this man is my cousin ; and yet Sydney, with a strange weakness in so firm a man, is fond of him. Trusts him, though he knows he is false ; frequents his society, though he sees it is corrupt, and would have him in all his counsels, though neither his faith nor his discretion merit reliance. Monmouth, too, Essex and Gray, all know him and endure him."

"So do not you, my husband," said Lady Russell, "for he is unworthy of you. I know not why it is," she added ; "I am not superstitious ; but I feel, when that man enters, a sort of dread, an awe which neither his character nor his qualities deserve. It is only like the feeling which they say affects the horse when a wild beast is near. An impression seems to creep over me that he will one day work sorrow to my house. I am glad you did not see him ; but here is supper, I think."

The next morning, early, Gertrude was in Lady Russell's dressing-room, and told her tale to a woman's ears with much less painful hesitation than had been the case when called upon to give the same account to Lord Russell. I will not dwell upon Lady Russell's conduct towards her ; suffice it that it was all that was kind, the mixture of motherly tenderness and sisterly love. The elder woman, who had as yet tasted but little sorrow in life, felt deeply for her whom she had known as a child, and who had tasted so much ; and she soothed and comforted her, promising her that assistance and protection which she herself was destined so soon to require.

"Lord Halifax," she said, "or, perhaps, Lord Sunderland, can best serve your father ; and as I know Russell will not ask any favour at the hands of either, I must endeavour to effect what we desire by my own relations. I will make no delay, dear girl, for I have known what the anguish of apprehension for a father is, and that such disquietude bears no procrastination. The King owes him justice ; he all throughout affected somewhat too openly to disbelieve the truth of the popish plot, when no one else doubted it ; and he could not ever suppose your father guilty, when all but a few base men, seeking their own foul objects, pronounced him innocent."

There was many a question asked by Gertrude, and many that she would fain have asked, but did not venture. The morning passed without her seeing Lord Russell, for he went out early, and had not returned when Lady Russell's coach was brought into the court and she invited her young friend to accompany her in her drive. "I have some ceremonious visits to pay," she said with a smile, "and I shall rudely make you wait in the coach while I go in ; but, nevertheless, I would fain have you go with me for many reasons, and I

shall take one of the children with me, too, to see the gay world."

Gertrude was willing enough to go, for she clung to the society of one so kind, and felt little disposed to indulge her own thoughts in solitude. From one splendid house to another the heavy coach of those days was dragged by its four tall horses, and at every door but one Lady Russell found admission; sometimes she returned with a grave face, sometimes with a smile upon her lip; but she said nothing of the object of her visits, and though her conversation was cheerful, yet there was a vein of thoughtfulness ran through it all, which showed her fair companion that business, rather than pleasure or ceremony, called her forth. At length the vehicle was ordered to drive to Whitehall, and there the lady was absent nearly twenty minutes. When she came back, the only observation which escaped her lips during the day upon the subject of what had passed within, found utterance. "Excellent old man!" she said, as she took her seat again; "it is sad that politics should ever estrange those whom nature meant for friends."

"Of whom do you speak, dear lady?" asked Gertrude.

"Of the Duke of Ormond," answered Lady Russell, "himself a great man, the father of one who would have been greater still, if the mysterious providence of God willed that the virtuous and the wise should always be long denizens of earth. I heard at Lady Marshal's that the Duke is now in London; and I much wished to see him before his return to Ireland. I, therefore, ventured to go to him myself, Gertrude, not fearing any scandal between the ancient duke and Rachel Russell, his old companion's daughter. Now we will homeward, for it is growing late, and doubtless my good lord is home by this time."

When the carriage again drove into the court at Southampton Place, there were several horses there, with dusty coats, and servants leading them to and fro, as if they had just come from a long journey. Lady Russell did not seem to notice a sight very common to her eyes, but passed on into the house. Gertrude, however, gazed with more interest, for her first thought was of her father; and she asked herself if he perchance might be among the visitors. She soon saw that it was against all probability, and gravely followed Lady Russell to the saloon which she had first entered on the preceding night. Lord Russell was standing at the further end of the room with a gentleman beside him, the sight of whom made Gertrude's heart beat.

Francis de Vipont as they entered turned from his noble companion, and advanced direct towards Lady Russell; but

ere he had taken three steps his eye fell upon Gertrude, no longer habited as the cottage girl, but as he had known her in former times ; and he stopped short for an instant in amazement.

"Gertrude!" he exclaimed, "Gertrude! Oh! my lord, this is indeed, as you said, a friend I little expected to see here!" and he took her hand and pressed his lips upon it.

"I will give you no time for explanation," said Lord Russell, with a smile ; "away, my young lord, to prepare for dinner. You see I was generous with you ; and in my letter of yesterday morning I would not throw out this tempting bait, though I much wished to catch you at Southampton Place."

Francis de Vipont's thanks were soon spoken, and his excuses made to Lady Russell for some want of courtesy in his first surprise.

A few sweet words in Gertrude's ear, ere he would force himself away, sent her to her chamber with a happy beating heart ; and the first day of her residence in London seemed to the hopeful bosom of youth like the dawn of new and brighter days than life had hitherto afforded.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It is certainly a serious case, my lord," said Francis de Vipont, as he sat with Lord Russell alone for a few minutes after dinner ; "I will own it has never struck me in the forcible light in which you have just placed it. That the government of the country can be carried on without Parliament is, of course, out of the question ; and I am willing to admit that the long suspension of popular assemblies is contrary to the spirit of the constitution and the rights of the subject. But I do not see that even this would justify an appeal to arms in resistance of established authority."

"Not till all other means have proved ineffectual," answered Lord Russell ; "and to escape the necessity of such an appeal must be one great object of all wise and good men. But how, my young friend, do you hope to avoid it, now that the King's ~~part~~ is so resolutely taken, and his ministers are using the opportunity afforded them by the suspension of all debates, to wrest from us the very means of making our voices heard at a future time, by attacking our municipal institutions, and rendering the various bodies of electors nought but the corrupt engines of the Court?"

"The King cannot carry on the government without money," replied Lord Francis ; "he can neither undertake a war, nor engage in a great enterprise of any kind, without calling upon his people for support, or having recourse to those illegal

means which will instantly generate a spirit of resistance through the whole land."

"In other words, force an appeal to arms," said Lord Russell; "and if these encroachments be suffered to proceed to that point unopposed, the appeal to arms may be made in vain; or, unprepared and ill-directed, it may end in anarchy instead of correction. Believe me, my dear Lord Francis, the worst service the friends of liberty can render to the cause of order is, to rest unprepared to resist tyranny."

"But what preparation can be made without treason?" demanded Lord Francis; "to raise troops, to purchase arms, are both overt acts of nothing else."

"Neither may be needful," said Lord Russell; "certainly neither is needful at present. But we may do much before we arrive at the point where such measures are required. We may unite all who entertain our sentiments in one common bond with ourselves; we may ascertain their numbers and their means; we may engage them to address the Crown in firm language, praying that the constitutional mode of ruling by Parliaments may be restored; and by assuming a firm attitude in the face of power, we may obviate the necessity for measures which no one would deplore more than myself. But every man must look to the possibility of resistance being ultimately required, and be ready to sanction it; for the notion of a limited monarchy without the right of resistance is an absurdity. However, let us talk no more of these subjects at present; we will speak of them more fully hereafter. At present I have a punishment to inflict on you, which you must bear with fortitude."

He spoke with a smile; and Lord Francis inquired in an absent manner, for his mind was still occupied with the conversation which had just taken place, "What is that, my lord?"

"I must deprive you for some hours of the society you love best," replied Lord Russell. "I am about to take Gertrude with me on a distant excursion. Ask no questions, but submit."

"With the best patience I may, my good lord," said his young companion. "Do you go immediately?"

"No," answered Lord Russell, "you shall have a respite of an hour or two; and then the axe must fall."

At the time, Francis de Vipont took little notice of the singular choice of figures which Lord Russell made use of; but at an after period he remembered, with a somewhat painful curiosity which could never be satisfied, that most of his noble friend's illustrations, during this and several other conversations, were borrowed from the prison and the scaffold.

Two hours passed by Lord Francis at Gertrude's side in sweet and happy talk, and then Lord Russell, who had been absent for a while, returned to the saloon, and for the first time informed her of his wish that she should accompany him on a distant drive. Gertrude started up, and gazed inquiringly in his face; but her kind host gave her no information, merely saying, "Take mantle and veil with you, Gertrude; for you will have to walk some way. If you have none such with you, Lady Russell will provide you."

Poor Gertrude was forced to have recourse to the offered kindness; for the scanty wardrobe which had been sent over from Malwood to the inn where Lord Russell had found her, comprised only the veil, and not the mantle of which he spoke; and by the time the latter was brought, examined, tried, and pronounced exactly suitable, the coach was in the court.

They set out with links before the carriage, which shed light into the great roomy caravan; and gazing into Lord Russell's face, Gertrude asked in a low tone, "You are taking me to see my father?"

"Yes, sweet lady," replied Lord Russell; "he arrived last night, and is in a place of perfect security, where he can lie concealed till a ship be ready to carry him to the Continent. A very small gratification will be sufficient to satisfy his entertainer."

Gertrude sighed, for the decided tone in which her companion spoke of her father's immediate return to the Continent, shaded, if it did not extinguish, one of the lights of the heart. She had conceived bright hopes, from her conversation with Lady Russell in the morning, that the form of a free pardon might be obtained for her father; but she now saw that Lord Russell did not share those expectations; and he was likely to judge on much better knowledge than hers. Her hopes faded, and she turned pale. Her companion seemed to feel that he had saddened her; and though he would not encourage fancies which he thought might prove vain, he strove to turn her mind away from darker imaginations.

"I have had news," he said, after a moment's pause, "from Cold Lock Inn, near Morriston; and I am glad to tell you, that Sydney's rash blow is not so likely, as we supposed, to have fatal results. The surgeons who had been brought from Oxford pronounced the wound not absolutely mortal, though dangerous; and they trust, when the moon changes, to be able to give a more decided opinion."

Yes, reader, such fancies still lingered in the medical world even of England. To Gertrude's mind, however, the information was a great relief; for though she knew nothing of

the moon's effects on wounds and bruises, yet she was very glad to hear there was a chance even, that the bad man, who had insulted and injured her, would not pay the dark penalty of unrepenting death for the evil he had committed. She had no feeling of revenge in her nature; and she would have spared him all punishment, if her wishes could have had effect, except as much as might be necessary to work a change in his hard heart.

For about half an hour the coach rolled slowly on, and then turned into the court of a large old house near the end of Holborn, where the links were at once extinguished; and alighting from the vehicle, Lord Russell handed her out, and threw the cloak over her shoulders. Then drawing her arm within his, he led her, dizzied and bewildered, through the streets of the great city, thronged at that moment with people of almost every rank and station, enjoying themselves on a fine May night, after the toilsome day. She observed that her noble companion pressed his hat further down upon his brow, and drew the collar of an outer garment which he wore, half coat half mantle, over his chin, so as to conceal a portion of his face; and the very feeling that their visit required secrecy agitated her a good deal.

Lord Russell probably felt her hand tremble upon his arm, for he said, in a low but kindly tone, "Do not be alarmed: there is no danger. It is as well that I should not be recognised where we are now going; but even if I were, it could lead to no bad results to your father."

At length, from crowded thoroughfares and busy multitudes, Lord Russell turned off into more quiet and secluded streets, where dark, tall houses, rising up, cast a deeper shadow in the way; but at length he and his fair companion stopped opposite the same large pair of doors which had given admittance to Sir William Ellerton the night before. A strong light was perceptible through the chink at the meeting of the two valves, and also underneath the door; and voices were heard speaking within. Lord Russell, however, knocked with his hand; on which one of the valves was cautiously thrown back.

Gertrude was standing in such a position, holding fast, in some trepidation, by Lord Russell's arm, that the scene in the inside of the large wine store was at once displayed to her eyes. Some four or five gentlemen were standing together at a little table, ten or twelve paces in advance, on which were ranged several glasses partly filled with wine, and two or three candles. They seemed in eager and vehement discussion; for there were hands stretched out, flushed cheeks, eager looks, and the demonstrative finger pressed upon the

table; but the countenance of only one was known to her, which was that of Algernon Sydney. The person who opened the door was a slender and rather short man, with sharp twinkling eyes, and an expression of a good deal of vivacity, but with little firmness in his countenance. He was well dressed, indeed rather too much so for his station; but, nevertheless, he wanted that freedom of air and manner which peculiarly distinguished the gentleman of those times. The moment he saw Lord Russell, he begged him, with a low bow, to come in, and drew the door still further back.

"No, no, Shepherd," said Gertrude's companion; "I will join them presently. You go round and open the other door, taking care that all your people are out of the way. This lady wishes to see Master Fenwick, and while you conduct her up to him, I can go down to my friends by the ladder."

"I am with you in a moment, my lord," said Shepherd. "Excuse me for shutting the door."

Leading Gertrude round to the other side of the house, Lord Russell waited for several minutes in the street before the door was opened. At length, however, Shepherd appeared with a light in his hand, and following him into the house, the lady and her noble friend were led along a narrow passage, and up a wider flight of steps, which conducted them to the long corridor where Sir William Ellerton had first paused after his ascent from the wine store.

"Who is there below, Shepherd?" asked Lord Russell, halting when he reached the middle of the corridor.

"There is the duke, my lord," said the wine-merchant, in reply, "and there is Lord Grey and Lord Essex, with Ferguson and Armstrong."

"I must speak with Ferguson," answered Lord Russell; "the man is mad, I think. Now go on with him, dear Gertrude, and he will take you to see him you wot of. Do not stir till I come. There are some gentlemen below with whom I must speak, but I will not be long."

"The time will not be tedious, my lord," replied Gertrude, and leaving her kind friend, she followed the wine-merchant towards her father's chamber.

Lord Russell, in the meantime, by the light of a lamp which burnt in the corridor, found his way to the door which led from the dwelling-house to the wine store below.

"Ah, here is Lord Russell," said one of the gentlemen near the table, as that nobleman descended. "We want a little of your cool counsel, my lord. Here are Hampden and Sydney getting very warm."

"Methinks there should be no occasion for heat, your grace," said Lord Russell, "where there is but one common

view. Though we may differ as to the means, we may consider them calmly. May I know if you have come to any determination?"

"None as yet," replied Sydney, "we were waiting for you; and, in the meanwhile, Ferguson here was about to read a declaration drawn up to make the nation fully acquainted with our complaints, our views, and purposes. Hampden objects that there is no need of reading it, till we have determined upon something which may render it necessary to publish it. I contend that if we thus stop at every step till another is decided, we shall never proceed at all."

"We may as well hear the paper read," said Lord Russell, "we need not, by any means, adopt or sanction it without further consideration."

The proposal was adopted; a tall, sallow-faced man, dressed in black, with a starched band, advanced to the table, with a bow to Lord Russell, and was proceeding to read a paper he held in his hand, when a step suddenly heard upon the ladder caused him to stop. The person who approached proved to be Shepherd, however, and Ferguson, for such was the name of the man in black, proceeded to read aloud a sort of manifesto, in which were set forth the complaints of the parties against the measures of the Crown, and a long recapitulation of grievances for which redress was demanded in a very peremptory tone. The terms of the whole document left no doubt that it was to be used upon the breaking out of a projected insurrection; and there was a good deal of malice and violence in the manner of putting the charges against the Court.

Lord Russell looked very grave, and when Ferguson had done, he said, somewhat sternly, "I think we had better not consider this paper at present, as many passages thereof I should decidedly object to; and besides, the necessity for armed resistance, to which it clearly points, has not yet arrived. No plans are arranged, none of the preliminary measures taken, and it will be easy to state our views when we have decided upon our conduct."

"Certainly," said Mr. Hampden; "if insurrection should ever be necessary, this is not the time for it. Recognising fully the right of the people to resist the encroachments of the Crown, when all other constitutional means fail, I must contend that the failure of all other means is the only justification of the exercise of that right."

"Your grandfather thought otherwise," murmured Sydney, in a low tone; but Hampden did not hear, or would not notice the words, and the Duke of Monmouth exclaimed, "I am decidedly of opinion that insurrection at present would be

very injudicious. It would not succeed, and therefore it would be wrong."

"Well, then, what is next to be done?" asked Lord Grey. "We must, I suppose, endeavour to move the people to a sense of their own danger?"

Sydney was about to reply, when a knock was heard at the door leading to the street, and Shepherd, approaching, opened it cautiously, and spoke to some one without. Then closing it again carefully, he returned to the table, and said, "It is Colonel Rumsey, your grace. He brings a message from the Earl of Shaftesbury. Shall I admit him?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," answered the Duke of Monmouth; and a powerful man, somewhat above the middle age, was introduced into their secret conclave. He was greeted as an acquaintance by several of the gentlemen present, and after a few words of common courtesy, proceeded to deliver a message from the Earl of Shaftesbury, urging the gentlemen present, in somewhat furious terms, to make no longer delay, but to raise the country to resistance before effectual resistance should be rendered impossible.

The Duke of Monmouth was about to reply, but Lord Russell interposed, saying, "I think we had better consult apart, my lord duke. If Colonel Rumsey will remain here, he shall have our answer to the earl's message in a few minutes," and taking up one of the lights, he led the way to a distant part of the store. A hasty consultation then took place, in the course of which the Earl of Shaftesbury's character and conduct were not spared; but at length Lord Russell called their attention to the true subject before them, saying, "Some answer must be returned, at all events, gentlemen; and as it would be very inexpedient to communicate our whole views to a personage whose opinions are never very firm, and whose flight from England has severed the tie between his party and himself, I think a mere general message may be sufficient, to the effect that we are not prepared to carry out the measures he recommends."

"Decidedly," said Sydney. "He has no title to expect more at our hands."

"You, Ferguson, make the communication to Colonel Rumsey, with what courteous phrases you may think fit," said the Duke of Monmouth; and the independent minister, who had been thrust by Shaftesbury himself into the counsels of men much superior to himself in station and influence, if not in powers of mind, advanced with a grim smile and bitter heart towards Colonel Rumsey, while the rest followed a step or two behind.

"I am commissioned, colonel, by these noble lords and

gentlemen," he said, in a harsh and dissonant tone, "to inform you, in answer to your message from the Earl of Shaftesbury, that Mr. Trenchard has failed them at Taunton, that they consider the country not ripe for insurrection, and that, in consequence, my Lord of Shaftesbury must rest contented at present."

Lord Russell turned away, saying, in a low voice, "That man must not be trusted further. He has gone beyond the terms dictated to him—but no matter," and drawing the Duke of Monmouth aside, he spoke a few words to him in private.

When the duke returned to the rest, Lord Russell was not with him, and Algernon Sydney soon after left the party; but Monmouth, Grey, Sir Thomas Armstrong, and Ferguson, remained for nearly half an hour, and Rumsey did not quit the store till they all separated.

A few minutes after the answer to Lord Shaftesbury's message had been delivered by Ferguson, the party was joined by Lord Howard of Escrick; and from the moment of his entrance, the conversation took a very different course from that which it had previously followed. A few bitter and caustic words from the last comer, as soon as he heard what had taken place before his arrival, led the minds of all present to the subjects from which it had been Lord Russell's wish to turn them, at least for the time.

"So," he said, "no insurrection! Well, I am a weather-cock, and ready to turn whichever way the wind blows as well as others. I should have thought it would have blown west, however; for as I passed through the park I saw some of the guards lolling by the decoy, and I thought to myself, If I had half-a-dozen old women with broomsticks, and a corporal's guard of chimney-sweeps, I would clear the town of the whole of you in five minutes."

"Not so easy as that, my good lord," said Sir Thomas Armstrong, with a somewhat contemptuous smile curling his lip. "Yet I think it might be done, with brave men, instead of old women and chimney-sweeps, and experienced officers to lead them, instead of your lordship."

"Do you think it could be really carried out successfully?" demanded Monmouth, turning to Armstrong, with whom he was intimate, "without endangering the life of the King or the Duke of York?"

"Undoubtedly, your grace," replied Armstrong; "and I would undertake to surprise and disarm them, with very little resistance, if I were permitted to pick my men, to the amount of half the adversaries' numbers. But if your grace choose to visit their posts with me to-morrow, I will show you what

state of discipline they keep, and how, by separating each body from the rest, they might be mastered at once."

"I will go, with all my heart," answered Monmouth.

"Just as a matter of speculation,—nothing more, remember."

"On those terms, I trust you will admit me to be of the party," said Lord Grey.

His offer was accepted at once, and shortly after the gentlemen separated. A memorable meeting, which, though no overt act of treason was committed—no plan of insurrection formed—no organised scheme even of resistance to arbitrary power laid out,—by the imperfection of evidence, by the perversion of law, by the cowardice of some, and by the treachery of others, brought many a noble head to the block, and spilt the best blood of England on the scaffold.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DURING the whole of the latter part of this conversation, Lord Russell was in the midst of a very different scene. In regard to such characters as his we have every sort of conventional nonsense. We have the minor theatre cant, which represents the brave and the patriotic as always tender and kind; we have the rough republican cant, which presents them to us as always stern and rude. But, in truth and verity, the domestic and the public qualities of man are so far separate, that we may make almost any combination we like, and we shall find an example thereof in history. So far from the lion and the lamb being always united, the true heroic character would appear much more amiable in the annals of the world than it does, if such were the case. But there are, alas! too few Lord Russells—too few who could go from a scene where the interests of his country—the destiny of his race—his own life itself—depended upon the words spoken and the resolutions formed; and casting from his mind all thought of such fearful hazards, after he had acted his own part to the satisfaction of his conscience, devote his mind and give up his heart to the kindlier feeling of social charity and domestic love. Grand is the spirit, indeed, which suffers not one duty to trench upon another—no one virtue to swallow up the rest.

Lord Russell sat beside Sir William Ellerton, while Gertrude rested on the other side, with her hand clasped in her father's, and her head leaning on his bosom, the first time for two long years; and Russell was very happy in the sight; for he believed that to be made the means of procuring so much pure joy to two noble beings, was a blessing to him-

The delight he witnessed so far absorbed his attention, that of the many things he wished to say to Sir William Ellerton, he did not say one for several minutes. Gertrude's father did not speak his thanks either, but pressed Lord Russell's hand, and that was thanks enough. But after a time Lord Russell broke silence, looking up suddenly from a fit of thought,—“I will not utter one word, Sir William,” he said, “to defend myself from the imputation of having taken any part against you in a sad affair now long past; for I am quite sure you are aware that I took none. On the contrary, I openly avowed my conviction that you were innocent, as I did in several other cases; and had the matter been brought before the House of Commons, my voice should have been loudly raised in your defence. The Council, however, took cognizance of the charge, and there I had no power.”

“I am aware, my good lord, I am aware,” replied Sir William Ellerton. “I know that I have much to thank you for,—nought to charge you with.”

“Nevertheless,” continued Lord Russell, “although we drop the past, there may, perhaps, be some feeling of surprise in your mind that I, an old and a sincere friend, and, moreover, a lover of justice, do not even now exert myself personally to remedy the wrong you still suffer.

Sir William waved his hand, but Lord Russell went on. “Hear me but one moment. I have told this dear lady that I cannot do so; and for fear of any mis-constructions, now or hereafter—perhaps, when I am in the grave; for who can tell his hour?—I would fain make clear the reasons why I cannot. Pride has no share therein; and if the question merely were, whether I should stoop to ask any favour of the Court I have so deeply offended, or whether I should venture to incur popular reproach, I would not hesitate; but there is more than this. I am identified with a great cause, which has too few defenders; and for the sake of that cause, I must not risk a doubt as to any of my actions, or appear as the solicitor of any grace at the hands of men whose conduct I publicly condemn, and whose measures I openly oppose.”

“I beseech you, my noble friend, say no more,” replied Sir William Ellerton. “Have I known you so many years to doubt you? I may differ with you, my lord, and you know I do—not upon principles, but as to the time when those principles come into action—not upon objects, but the means of attaining those objects; but to distrust your honour or your probity, your sincerity or your virtue, would be to believe that nature's self had made a lie. And how let me thank you, not so much for your kind interest in myself, as for what you have done for this dear child. She has told me

all. Notwithstanding my sufferings, my lord, I offer up to God, night and morning, my thanks for many blessings undeserved; and henceforth I shall have to thank Heaven likewise, that in the moment of danger and distress, my Gertrude found a Russell and a Sydney to befriend and defend her."

"Sydney," said Lord Russell, with a smile, "is a great contradiction. He is the only republican knight-errant that ever lived—though," he added, more thoughtfully, "perhaps there was more of republicanism in knight-errantry than we imagine. Yet Sydney puts all these things so strongly in contrast in his own nature, that we are almost inclined to believe that he combines incompatible qualities. The scholar, the gentleman, the aristocrat, the true Christian, he is nevertheless republican in theory, rude in his forms, despising over-cultivation, and in times to come may be branded as an unbeliever. But his sword is always as ready to spring from its sheath for a woman as against a tyrant; and in both cases, I might add, almost too ready. His haste, in the case of Sir Frederick Beltingham, had well nigh caused us serious inconvenience. It would have been far better to have dealt with him for his offence according to law."

"Law, my noble lord, is not always the surest course," replied Sir William Ellerton. "In the hands of English juries, and—alas! that I should say—of English judges, it has proved a perilous security."

"True," replied Russell; "but there is no better to be had. The greatest implied insult which has ever been put upon our courts of law is, the determination of the Crown to obtain the nomination of the sheriffs. The true object must be, to punish its adversaries by the packing of juries against them in all crown cases. God forbid that we have not false accusations too! It would not surprise me; and wherever the blow falls, it will fall heavy."

The conversation then turned to other things; and Sir William Ellerton gave his daughter and Lord Russell an account of the difficulties and dangers he had met with in reaching London; and he dwelt long, with deep gratitude, upon the services of Dick Myrtle. When he paused, both his auditors asked at once, "But where is he now?"

"Out walking through the city," said Sir William. "He proposed to return to-day to his own quiet home; but something occurred this morning, I know not what, to make him change his resolution, and he remains till to-morrow; but he feels a prisoner here, and he proves his liberty to himself by wandering through these streets at night. To-morrow, however, I shall lose my companion."

"Oh! let me take his place," cried Gertrude, casting her-

self upon her father's bosom ; " that will indeed be a blessing ! "

" No, my dear child, " replied her father, firmly ; " that cannot be. If Lady Russell will kindly shield you till I can find means of escaping, she will redouble my gratitude ; then I will take you with me, never to leave you again unprotected. "

" Better far, my friend, to leave her with us, " said Lord Russell ; " she shall be, in all respects, as a daughter of our house. "

But Sir William Ellerton was firm ; and at a late hour parted with his child, not without a sigh that they were forced to part at all.

Leaving the fugitive and his daughter, I must now turn to trace the wanderings of Dick Myrtle, who, as Sir William Ellerton had said, did feel as a prisoner in Shepherd's house, though he was free to come and go as he liked. When he rose in the morning, his first thought was, could he venture to go out ? and the very doubt of such a thing was disagreeable to one whose actions had always been as uncontrolled as those of a wild bird. More to prove his free agency than for any other purpose, then, Dick Myrtle found his way down stairs, and issued forth into the street. There, however, he paused, looking about him before Shepherd's door for a few minutes, and then turned the corner, hesitating which way he should go. As he did so, his eyes rested on the figure of a man whom he knew, speaking with the master of the house, at the gates of the wine store ; and he was advancing at once towards them, when the man turned and walked hastily away. Dick Myrtle would not pursue him, though some doubts and suspicions crossed his mind ; and walking up to Shepherd himself, he addressed him in a common everyday tone, with some inquiries about his wines.

" Sir, you shall taste them in a moment, " replied Shepherd, " and I flatter myself that you will say you have never had finer wines of any kind than I can offer you, pass your lips ; but had you not better come in, Mr. Jones, and taste the wines in a snug little room up-stairs ? If I have a right notion of things, your being seen in the streets might be uncomfortable. "

" Oh, no ! " answered Dick Myrtle ; " you mistake, Mr. Shepherd. I have nothing uncomfortable about me. My friend, indeed,—how do you call him ?—oh, Fenwick ; he is not to be trusted in the streets, but I have had a better education. So I'll just step in here and taste some of your nectar, of which, perhaps, I may purchase a hogshead, if it suits me. "

"Certainly, Mr. Jones, certainly," replied Shepherd, leading the way into what might be called the dormitory of his wines; "here are some of the best. I do not think you will match them in London. What shall it be that I first place before you, Mr. Jones? These large casks are from the Island of Madeira, and though not now much liked, were greatly in fashion at the time of the marriage. They are fifteen years older than when I first had them, but this is a wine which is, unlike woman, the older the better."

"No, none of that," said Dick, in a quiet tone; "I drank it once, and it is sour stuff. But what wines was Keeling tasting just now? He is a good judge, I should think. I remember when he was at our house one day, he swallowed two jugs of prime Bordeaux, and thanked God over them with great devotion."

"Oh, sir, he was not tasting wines," replied Shepherd; "only a little business in the way of trade—nothing more. I did not know you were acquainted with him, as you did not speak."

"Oh, yes," answered Dick Myrtle, "I know him very well; but he turned away in such a hurry when he heard a step, that he did not see me. To the wines, however, Mr. Shepherd; to the wines! No, I will have no thin stuff, some solid Oporto is best suited to my tune of life."

"Well, sir, I can match you," replied Shepherd; "but we must come further in. Here, Jeremiah! Jeremiah! bring an end of a candle and a Venice glass. There are merchants in London, Mr. Jones, whose wines would split a Venice glass all to pieces, if the tale be true that it cracks when poison is poured in—ha, ha, ha!—but you will not find that with mine, I can tell you. What, Jeremiah! will you never come?"

"Here, sir, here!" cried one of the lads of the house, running up with a glass still wet with recent washing, and a piece of lighted candle stuck into a cleft stick, precisely according to the fashion of the present day; and Mr. Shepherd, taking the light, guided his guest on through his wilderness of casks.

"Now, sir, here is Oporto in the wood," cried the wine merchant. "I flatter myself that you cannot name any wine grown in Europe, or the Greek Islands, that you will not find here. Draw some of great II, you dog, Jeremiah, and let the gentleman taste if ever he found anything more glorious between his palate and his tongue than that."

"I should much like to have Keeling's opinion upon the wine, ha, Master Shepherd?" said Dick Myrtle; "he must be a good judge, I should think. Where does he live? I will find

him out. He does not know I am in London, or he'd be glad enough to see me."

Shepherd gave the man's address, but instantly presented a glass of heady Port to Dick Myrtle, who drank about one half, and then pronounced it somewhat too young a wine, to the surprise and admiration of the wine merchant, who had not conceived a very high opinion of his judgment in such commodities.

"'Tis that the wine is so rich of the grape, Mr. Jones," he replied, "that it takes longer to ripen than others. Upon my conscience! it has been here above ground twenty years. But we have others—there is no want of wine here. You can have twenty different vintages. What think you of this? See the date is marked upon it, 1657. Will that suit you?"

"We will see," said Dick Myrtle, while Jeremiah drew some wine from this fresh barrel; and after tasting the juice, exclaimed, "That is better, Master Shepherd; but I should like to know what is in that pipe we have so negligently passed?"

"Really, I do not well know what it is like," answered Shepherd, in an indifferent tone. "It has not had any drawn out of it yet. It will not be fit to drink for a while."

Dick Myrtle tried hard to have some drawn for his especial pleasure; but Shepherd resisted; and Dick made up his mind that it contained gunpowder. In that supposition he was wrong. There was nothing within but bullets.

"Well," he said, at length, after having tasted two more sorts of wine, "this must be my liquor, Master Shepherd: 1657; and now we will haggle about the price, if you please. You'll find me more difficult to do business with than Keeling, though I've a notion," he added, speaking in Shepherd's ear, "that he was here more upon Lord Howard's business than his own."

Shepherd gave a start and cried, "Hush!" and Dick Myrtle nodded his head with a mysterious smile, saying, in a whisper, "Mum, Master Shepherd—mum is the word."

Retiring to a room up stairs, the two parties began to chaffer for the pipe on which Dick Myrtle had fixed, and for some time not a word was said upon any subject but pounds, shillings, and pence; but the bargain being at length settled, Shepherd asked to what address he should send the wine.

Dick Myrtle nodded his head, significantly, saying, "When I go, Master Shepherd, then you shall have directions and money in hand; but I intend to burden you till to-morrow, for I must see Keeling, and a lawyer named West. He's an old friend of ours, and helped my father to a good sum of money in old Noll's time."

"Oh, ho!" said Shepherd, "you are one of that sort, are you, sir? Then I dare say you know all about their affairs."

"No," answered his companion, in a more decided tone than he had hitherto used, "no, Master Shepherd, I do not; but I intend to know more about them soon, and that is the reason I am going to see Keeling."

"Why he is in a bit of fright, Mr. Jones, and that is the truth," replied Shepherd, still honouring Dick Myrtle with the name he had bestowed upon him at their first meeting; "he's quick, but he is timid, and it is all about his having met some one who knew him, when he was down mumming a bit, in a servant's coat, in the country. So you will not see him if you go before it is dark, I should think."

"I'll take care not to do that," answered Dick Myrtle, "but I imagine he is in no danger; and now, Master Shepherd, I will go up and see if my comrade is awake, for I am growing somewhat hungry, and long to break my fast."

Not a sound was heard in Sir William Ellerton's chamber, however, and Dick Myrtle sat down and gave himself up to thought; but the train of his reflections was very different from that in which most men would have indulged in his situation. Living much apart from other men, excluded by his birth from associating on equal terms with persons of high station, though often of no greater wealth than himself; raised by fortune above the class from which he sprang, giving himself up by inclination to the sports of the field, Dick's mind, like his body, had learned to pursue a course of its own. He was naturally inquisitive, and both naturally and habitually fond of enterprise, so that he was very careless of his own safety, and not very prudent in his own decisions; yet to do him but justice, he was keen, provident, and politic in the execution of his designs, however rashly they might be framed, and always more thoughtful in the service of others than in his own case.

"What are these men about?" he asked himself, as he sat and ruminated, "there is something in the wind, evidently; and I must know what it is. That fellow Keeling used to talk real treason when he had got his skin full of wine, and Lord Howard of Esrick is rascal enough to be traitor too. Good Lord Russell, too, they say, loves the King and the Duke of York, as a bloodhound loves ripe grapes. I should not at all wonder if we had got here into the midst of a wasp's nest, and Sir William may be run into a greater scrape than the King. The men must be mad to think of doing anything against the Crown now. Why we are all Tories; the very church bells cry, God bless King Charles!—and yet all that meeting at Old Lock, which the horse-boy at Merrington told us of,

and Russell and Colonel Sydney there with Howard and Keeling : put all that together, and it is clear what is toward. I'll try and damp them, however. Keeling is an arrant coward, and will soon be frightened out of plotting. But I'll see West first. He's the devil incarnate, though he did get my father a contract from Old Noll ; but he must know what is going on, if any one does ; for if there be mischief in the world, he is sure to have a hand in it : an unbelieving imp."

Such were some of our good friend's remarks. Dick was not at all for Sir William Ellerton, after his long journey, but his mind was fond of pursuing a devious track. When at length the good knight awoke, however, he was anxious that his kind guide and companion should quit his dangerous society as soon as possible ; but pleading some business in London, without breathing his suspicions, Dick Myrtle announced his determination of remaining till the following morning, and passed part of the day in asking, with a careless air, at the quays and docks for any vessel freighted to France or Holland. He was disappointed in his inquiries—one would be ready to sail in ten days, another, they said, in a week, but nothing was even promised sooner, and Dick Myrtle was well aware that the engagements of ship's captains are not always most punctually executed. He neither told his inquiries nor their result to Sir William Ellerton at his return, but revolved in his own mind the means of facilitating his companion's escape, and as soon as it was dark set out again upon his rambles through the town.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"IN the name of the devil, if there is such a beast, go in peace, Dick Myrtle !" cried an elderly man, with keen sharp eyes and a haggard countenance, which strangely belied a gay and brilliant smile, that from time to time came upon his lip. But as very sour wines will often effervesce as much as the sweetest, so the sparkle of wit and pleasantry will not unfrequently rise up from the dissatisfied heart, as well as from the contented one. At present, however, he spoke not only seriously, but impatiently ; and Dick Myrtle's reply did not tend to render him more tranquil.

"Not I, West," he said. "Here I am for half-an-hour to come. Why, man, I have nought on which to bestow my idleness. I cannot go to sleep, like a dog in his hutch, nor wash my face with my paws, like a cat in a window ; nor lie snug in a hole, and look out without showing my nose, like a fox ; nor sit with my legs bundled up under me, like a hare in her form. I have no way of amusing myself, I tell you,

but to stay here and see you look grim and fierce, and eat the nails off your left hand, as if hay were not to be found in the market, and there were no thistles upon the common."

"I am busy, I tell you, sir," said West, the lawyer. "I am expecting friends every instant on matters of importance, and——"

"Have you not a good friend here present?" asked Dick Myrtle. "And as for business, that can be done at any time. Business is a dull beast which can be shot sitting, pleasure is the game that must be hit on the wing. Then, again, what pleasure can be equal to Dick Myrtle's company?"

"On my life, you will drive me mad, Dick!" cried the lawyer. "If you were not your father's son, I would draw my sword and drive you out."

"No easy task, Master West," replied Dick Myrtle, with a laugh. "I think it would take five of you, and as good a sword-player as any in Europe to boot, to drive me out of this place, when I am determined to stay."

"You do not know what you are doing," cried West, vehemently. "You are likely either to commit yourself to what you would sooner eat your flesh than have ought to do with, or to have your throat cut as a spy."

"If that is the case, I had better go," replied Dick Myrtle, seeing that the man was terribly agitated; but West suddenly put his hand upon his arm, saying, in a low voice, "They are coming!—What can we do?—Here, come here," and he rather dragged than led him into an inner chamber, where he threw open the door of a deep closet, saying, "There, go in there; it is your only resource."

"Not I," said Dick Myrtle, stoutly.

"Man, you will be your own destruction, and mine," said West, in a deep, stern tone. "You are a marked man, I tell you. In, in quick! If they find you with me, they will think I have betrayed them."

Dick Myrtle made no further resistance when he found that it was for his own personal safety that West feared, and going in at once, the door was shut upon him, locked, and the key taken out.

The moment that this was done, the lawyer turned, and, with trembling hands, took down a book from a shelf, turned over some of the pages, and kept an ear upon the door. The next instant, that of the outer room was opened, and a round, hollow voice exclaimed, "Why, West, are you not here?"

"Yes, I am here," replied West, from within. "I am only waiting out a case upon seizin and possession."

"Seizing the King and possessing his portmantle," said another voice, and five or six faces looked in at him through

the half-open door, while the steps of several other persons were heard entering the outer room.

"He always affects to have some practice," observed one of the visitors, with a laugh.

"And you, Rouse, to have more bad practices than you have," replied West. "Why, as tame a calf as ever bleated, he pretends to be a sad libertine amongst women. To hear him talk, one would suppose him a perfect rover, and the very look of a maid's eye makes him blush. He is a most opening rose," and shutting the book, he replaced it on the shelf, and returned to the other room, closing the door behind him.

The scene of all this transaction was the chambers of a poor lawyer, high up in one of the tall houses of the Temple. The outer room was of tolerable size, but not very spacious, and its sole furniture consisted of chairs and tables, a high desk, and a book-case. The inner chamber was a bed-room, but it also served as a sort of library, or study, where the lawyer sometimes received a client, when such a rare fish came to his net, while his solitary clerk, who acted also the part of shoe-cleaner, sat perched up at the high desk in the outer room, with the air of having something to do.

"Open that door, open that door!" cried a harsh-looking man, who had just entered. "What the fiend do you shut the door for, West? We shall be suffocated here. We always have it open, and now the man closes it when the days grow warmer and warmer."

"I feel it somewhat chilly," said the lawyer. "I dare say we shall do very well here."

"Pooh, pooh!" cried the same authoritative gentleman. "Why, there are five or six more coming, and the room is crowded already. Where do you expect us to sit? On our thumbs? Open the door, man, and give us breath."

With evident disinclination, West opened the door into the other room, but the necessity of so doing soon became apparent; for it was hardly done, when three more men entered, and then two more, and part of the tide flowed at once into the inner room. There were now more than twenty persons collected, and for about five minutes that scene of confusion and babble took place which generally—I might say, always—occurs in England when a number of men, not constituted in a regular and organised body, meet to discuss some particular question, affecting many of them differently, according to their various characters and interests. The sounds which reached the ears of Dick Myrtle fluctuated between extreme distinctness and an indefinite buzz, as the persons who spoke were near to or far from his place of concealment.

"Oh, kill him like a dog," said one.

"When is the punch ordered?" asked another.

"A table would be better," observed a third.

"The list!"

"A couple of hundred horse!"

"A carriage could not pass."

"Send her and the harlot back to their own countries."

"Hark! then, read, read!"

"We shall never get into order."

"What?"

"What the matter?"

"The devil you did!"

"I'll take it on my damnation."

"Of nothing but venison and fat capons."

"For shame! young man. To swear is unbecoming a Christian."

"I do not care how much blood is shed, so the object be attained."

"The country is in a fever, and wants blood-letting."

"Now, gentlemen, Mr. West will read over the names. If all be not here at the end, the door must be locked, notwithstanding."

"We are all here, I think."

Such were some of the sounds which penetrated into Dick Myrtle's place of refuge, and a sort of droning hum was kept up through the whole, from voices in the far part of the outer room, which occasionally drowned the accents of the nearer speakers, and cut parts out of each sentence they uttered.

Many men in Dick Myrtle's situation would have felt some annoyance, curiosity, or alarm at the position in which he was placed, overhearing the consultations of men who were totally ignorant of his proximity, and who were evidently engaged in dangerous schemes. But he felt none of such emotions. He was not at all displeased at being an unseen listener—he rather liked the occupation than otherwise; nor was he at all ashamed: he felt neither compunction nor fear. He did not, indeed, exert his faculties to catch or distinguish the sounds, and he was fully resolved never to betray a word that he heard; but he by no means shut his ears.

After the last words which I have mentioned, there was a comparative silence for a minute or two, and then the voice of West was heard, reading from a paper, as follows:—

"Colonel Walcot, Colonel Rumsey, Master ex-Sheriff Goodenough, Master Hone, Master Rouse, Master Holloway, Master Lee, Master Keeling, Master Bourne, Master Rumbold, Master Tyler, Master Ayliffe, Master Norton, Master Ferguson, Master Nelthrop, Major Holme, Master Sherwood,

Master Hardacre, Master Smith, Master Oliver, Master Case, Master West."

All severally answered to their names, except Ferguson and Rumsey, and then West, proceeding in his ordinary tone of voice, said, "Now gentlemen I have ordered the punch to be brought to the door at ten of the clock, by which time I trust we shall have done our consultation. And in this I have deviated from the usual custom, of having the punch first and the consultation afterwards, for several reasons. In the first place, the punch being a valiant fellow makes some of us pot-valiant; in the next place, when punch is the first-born, consultation gets but a younger son's portion; and in the next, as the punch is strong, and we are—as worthy Master Keeling would say—but weak vessels to put it in, we had better make the best use we can of the vessels before we risk cracking them with the strong liquor. If you all approve of this, and can talk dry-lipped till ten, I propose that the door be locked, and the house being thus tiled in, that Master Goodenough do take the chair; and that we at once proceed to business."

The door was accordingly locked, the dictatorial man, who had so loudly called for air, was seated with a table before him, and a discussion, or rather conversation, ensued, which from the enigmatical terms employed, greatly puzzled Dick Myrtle as to the real meaning of what he heard.

"Now, gentlemen," cried Goodenough, "I suppose that there is no change of purpose in any man, notwithstanding the unfortunate accident which deprived us of the best opportunity possible. We all go for the lopping,* I think; but shall it be one branch or two? I am for bringing down both blackbird and goldfinch."†

"Shake the whole tree!" cried a man with gray hair, near the door, "unless you do that, you do nothing."

"Zachary Bourne says well," rejoined a man with a military air, "unless you attack both head and stomach,‡ the great object is lost."

"I differ from you there, Major," replied a man named Hone, "you might lop the captain without touching the lieutenant. It is their working together that is the evil."

"Pooh, pooh! lop them both!" cried a stern man with a scar upon his brow. "Do not let us ever go back from what is once fully determined. We are all of the same opinion, Master Goodenough; but when and how are we to buy and sell?"

"As for the when," said West, who had not hitherto

* Killing. † The King and the Duke of York. ‡ The same.

§ Commence the insurrection.

spoken, "that must be decided by our state of preparation. I have done as was agreed at our last meeting, namely, purchased thirty pair of swan's feathers, thirty pair of goose quills, and the same number of crow quills.* But you must have more than that."

"Enough for the present," said Major Holmes, "if we only shake the tree without coming to the principal point, one crow quill is as good as a hundred; † but now let each man who has an opinion give it, that we may decide upon some thing this night. All our time was wasted at Cold Lock. Your gentlemen have so many scruples, and so many punctilios, that we must do without them, and act for ourselves."

"For them to take advantage of afterwards," said West.

"Perhaps so," answered Holmes sternly; "but what matters it to us by whom the honour is reaped, so that a great and righteous deed be done, and our deliverance effected? I seek my country's freedom, not an empty name. Colonel Walcot, you speak as one who have experience, and have proved yourself in times of struggle."

"You know my opinion well enough," replied Walcot sharply; "I have not the thought of slaying in secret. I will not abandon my friends, or bring division into their councils; but I love it not."

"I say that it is a duty," exclaimed Goodenough, "if we are to move in this affair at all. What are two lives as an atonement for all the evil that has been done? Will not the sacrifice of those two lives, by striking terror into the minions of power, enable us to master all points of importance with little if any resistance, and thus spare the effusion of a ten-fold greater quantity of Christian blood?"

"There is some truth in that," replied Colonel Walcot, "but still I am a soldier, not a butcher; and I will keep myself, in what I have to say, to the principal point. For that, then, I think it necessary that two or three of us who know the town well, should meet, and with a map before us, lay it out into twenty districts. For each of these districts, some man of action must be appointed as colonel, who will hold communication with all the patriots therein, organise their movements, give them their rallying points and watchwords, and be their mouth-piece to this committee. All the soldiers of the good old times who are now remaining in London, must be diligently sought out and distributed through these districts, under the command of the colonels appointed. Money must be collected by some means, but with that I

* Swan's feathers, goose quills, and crow quills, meant different kinds of fire-arms.

† Kill the King without proceeding to a general insurrection.

will have nought to do but paying my share. But when all is arranged, the strongest points of each district must be seized, and when in any there is no point of importance, the men of that district must join those of another. The chief points seem to me to be—the Artillery-ground, London-bridge, the Exchange, and the posts of the guards at the Savoy, Whitehall, and the Tower. At the Tower will be the severest struggle, and we must bring all the Scotchmen whom Ferguson has promised, to bear upon that. Many minor details can be settled hereafter; one or two sentries in each district may be seized upon and made guard-houses and magazines, in case the strife should be protracted. Money for a provisional government must be obtained at any risk, and even with some injustice, which can be rectified afterwards. Indiscriminate pillage, however, must be forbidden upon pain of death; and all men must be instructed to direct their whole efforts to the one great object."

"But the Tower, the Tower, Colonel," cried the man named Rouse, "how is that to be accomplished? Why, it is the strongest fortress in Europe; you will never get possession of it but by famine."

A contemptuous smile curled Colonel Walcot's lip; and he replied in a sneering tone, "It is the strongest fortress in London, Master Rouse, but that is all. We must find some shorter way with it than famine. The plan I should propose, gentlemen, is as follows. But first let me remark, that the Tower, though a place of very little importance as a place of strength, is of immense importance to us, and must be the very first point secured. In the first place, it is full of arms and ammunition, of which we shall have some want. In the next place, its water communication is of great consequence to whatever party possesses it; and it would not do, while we are acting against the Savoy and Whitehall, to be taken in the rear. Lastly, the very report of the Tower having fallen, will spread consternation amongst the guards and courtiers, and probably stop all resistance."

"But the plan, the plan!" cried a stout hale man, with the air and look of a countryman, "how is it to be effected?"

"Why thus, Master Rumbald," rejoined Walcot; "but I propose it, of course, subject to the approbation of all:—On the day appointed, let seven or eight of our people go in two or three parties, asking to see the lions and the armoury. If they go about dinner time, they will be either refused point blank by the wardens, or told to wait. In either case they will be within the walls by that time, and they can walk into the sutler's, close by the inner gate, to seek a glass of ale or

anything else. Shortly after, six or eight others can drive in, in a coach, on pretence of visiting some of the prisoners. A pretended quarrel may take place between their coachmen and some of our friends at the sutler's, and in the scuffle one of the horses may be killed, and the coach overturned just in the gateway, so as to prevent the portcullis from falling, and the bridge from being raised. Three hundred of Ferguson's Scotchmen, with as many Englishmen as we can spare, must be held ready to rush upon the outer gates, and seize them at once. ~~The place~~ The place will then be ours."

"A capital plan, a capital plan!" cried several voices. A few moments were given to some further details; and then the man Hone exclaimed, rubbing his hand with a ferocious sort of zest, "Now for the lopping; for that seems to me the great stroke of all, and without it nothing will be done. Let us hear how that is to be accomplished."

"No more shooting at the captain* with arrows, Master Hone," said West, whose bitter and sarcastic spirit could not be restrained even towards his fellow conspirators; and the man Rumbald exclaimed, with a laugh, "No, that will never do; my plan is the best; although, in fairness, I must tell you my brother's, which is this: The next time the King and the Duke go to the theatre together, as they did last week, blow the whole place up. He knows two of the scene-shifters, and the property man, and he has sounded them about his scheme."

"How?—what?" replied Colonel Walcot and several others, "he has not dared to tell them?"

"No, no," cried Rumbald, "he has told them nothing; but he has two or three barrels of smuggled goods, and he asked if they would let him hide them for a week or two in the vaults under the theatre, till he could get the things out by degrees."

"It will not do, it will not do," said Colonel Walcot, "curiosity or knavery would lead some of the men to examine what was in the barrels, knowing that he could not punish them, whatever they did; and so the whole matter would be found out."

"A much better plan would be," observed a man in black, a lawyer, by the name of Tyley, "to mount half a dozen good marksmen on the wall of Bedford-gardens, on the first moonlight night when the King goes to the theatre. Then ~~as~~ he comes back, let three aim at him, and three at the Duke."

"You would have the watch pulling them down by the ~~tail~~ and some one.

* The King.

"Pooh! nonsense," cried Tyley, "I have seen a dozen boys and men sitting there to see the coaches pass."

"But not with guns in their hands," replied Walcot. "It would be easier to plant some good marksmen behind the trees in the park; and when the King and the Duke walk across, as they do two or three times a-week, from Whitehall to St. James's, pick them out with a steady aim; but I will have nothing to do with it, for I do not like the thing at all; and as for blowing up the theatre, it is the most diabolical thing I ever heard. Did your brother think, Major Rumbald, how many innocent persons he would murder to punish one or two guilty ones?"

"It is a terrible aggravation of the crimes of despotic power," said Ayloff, the lawyer, in a thoughtful and solemn tone, "that they drive the people to commit or devise crimes as great, in order to free themselves from the intolerable yoke."

"You must come to my scheme after all," said Rumbald. "Wait till the King goes again to Newmarket, then gathering force at my place, the Rye-house, near Hoddesdon, one man on horseback can ride forward a mile or two on the road, and bring us news when the carriage is coming; we can then overturn one of my carts, just round the corner, where they will not see it till they are close upon it. There are never more than ten or twelve guards with the coach; and then Colonel Walcot can charge with a body of our own horse, who can lie concealed in the court till the moment they are needed, while we put the two tyrants to death. Look here! this is a plan of the farm: there is the house, a nice old place, which would stand a siege, if need be; here is the moat round the grounds and a thick wall; then up the west side, you see, comes the road from Newmarket, and at that corner turns away to the south, still keeping along the moat and the wall. There I would overturn the cart, so that the carriages could not pass. Here you see the great gates and a drawbridge over the moat, so that a charge out of the court would take the guards in the rear and flank. As soon as it was all done, we could separate by all these lanes and bye-ways, get into London, and raise the city. Nothing can be more easy than the whole affair, with stout hands and hearts to execute it."

"Let me look at the plan," said Major Holmes; and while Rumbald handed it over to him, Keeling, who had not spoken, thought fit to address the party upon a totally different subject—as so constantly happens in meetings of the kind—and prevented any decision from taking place. The matter which he chose to discourse upon was the probability of discovery, if they met frequently without proceeding to action. "A thing

happened to me, two or three nights ago," he said, "which I look upon as dangerous. I went down to meet my Lord Howard, and go with him to the assembly at Morrington. I dare say you all wondered we did not come; but the good lord is fond of his pleasure, and he stayed drinking and galanting at an inn, till we had to ride like fury to Morrington, and then did not arrive till it was too late. We found the people at the inn there quite full of the meeting, and wondering what it was all about. We walked on, nevertheless, to Cold Lock, though it was past midnight, thinking we might see some of them; but the house was shut up, and they would not let us in; and just as we were going away again, we met three men, one of whom made Lord Howard draw his sword, upon some quarrel, I know not what, and the other two stood by, to prevent me and his servant from meddling. We were about to do so, however, but something made me keep very quiet. I had put on a livery coat of Lord Howard's, not to be known; and I thought I was so well disguised that nobody could discover me. One of the other two men, however, looked at me by the moonlight, and said with a laugh, 'Why, Keeling, man, you are discovered: take my advice, and think twice what you are about.'"

"Who was he?" cried Goodenough; "did you know him?"

"Oh yes," answered Keeling, "he is one Richard Myrtle, a rich farmer's son, near Wincombe: a very wealthy man: we have him down in the list for that county as "a man worthy"—to be hanged! Is it not so, Mr. West? He is a rank Tory, and his father was a malignant at heart, though he made half his money by the Parliament."

"His name is down, I believe," said West, "but I do not think he is one to do any harm."

"He has come up to London since, however," said Keeling, "for I saw him this morning. I should like to know what brought him up so quickly. Besides, he was hanging about near Shepherd's, watching all that is going on, I am sure; so that it is clear to me he has got some clue, whether much or little I can't tell."

Keeling's communication produced a great deal of discussion and some heat; the more timid of the conspirators taking alarm and showing it openly, and the cooler and more courageous treating their comrades' apprehensions with contempt, which irritated without reassuring them. West contented himself simply with saying that he was sure Dick Myrtle, a well-known man of honour, would not turn informer, whatever he suspected; and Major Holmes observed, that if there were the least chance of his doing so, it would be the duty

of the first man who met him, to send a bullet into his brains.

While this subject was still occupying the party, there was a loud knock at the door, which made Keeling and one or two others start and turn somewhat pale; but West observed dryly, "It is only the punch. I am glad it is come, for it will be very serviceable on this occasion."

He accordingly unlocked the door, and two drawers from the Temple Tavern brought in two large bowls of steaming fluid, which being set upon the table, were soon used to disgorge a part of their fragrant contents. The glass circulated freely; two other bowls were subsequently brought; and, in a very short time, the apprehensions which some of the conspirators had entertained, gave place to the fumes of the courageous liquor. West himself drank deep, for, to say the truth, while taking part in the discussions which went on with a calm bitter air, his mind was troubled with very different thoughts, of not the most pleasant complexion; and he was anxious to raise his spirits and to nerve his mind against what he foresaw must follow. Like most others who seek support in aught else but their own resolution, he went further than he proposed, and when, at the time the fourth bowl was near its end, the party broke up once more without coming to any resolution, the lawyer, though not absolutely drunk, had lost some portion of steadiness in thought and limb. He saw his companions to the door, however, with all due ceremony, agreed to meet them all on a day named, early in June, at Walcot's house, in Goodman's Fields, and lighted them partly down the narrow stairs.

When he returned to his own chambers, West carefully locked the door; and then going to a cupboard in the inner room, he took out a brace of pistols and ascertained that they were charged, and the powder dry in the pan. He next looked into the last bowl of punch, and finding about a glass and a half therein, drank it off at a draught. Then sitting down, he meditated for a moment or two, and having apparently made up his mind, approached the closet and opened the door.

Dick Myrtle instantly walked out with the coolest air in the world, saying, "Devil take it, West, what long-winded fellows your friends are. I thought they never would take themselves off, and do not thank them for keeping me here shut up in a dark hole for two long hours, obliged to sit like a Turk or a Tailor, for want even of a joint stool."

But West, without attending to his words, placed himself before him with a pistol in his hand, saying, in a voice he intended to be very stern, but which was somewhat impaired in

dignity by liquor, "This won't do. You have heard all that was said."

"Every word of it," answered Dick Myrtle; "but that is not true either. Not every word, Master West, but the greater part of the words."

"Then," said West, with a horrid oath, "you shall not go out of this room alive, unless you will take the oath that we all take;" and he pointed the pistol at his visitor's breast, adding, "It is your own fault. You would stay when I wanted you to go; and you must take the consequence."

"Oh, West!" cried Dick Myrtle, affecting alarm he did not feel, "in Heaven's name, put by that pistol, man! You have cocked it. It might go off, seeing you are more than half drunk."

"I don't care for God or Devil," cried the atheist; "I don't believe in either. But of one thing, I am quite sure, Dick Myrtle; you are a dead man in five minutes, if you do not take the oath to go through with us in everything, and betray us in nothing."

"A dead man in five minutes!" replied Dick Myrtle, "that is not pleasant. I hope the hangman will give you more time, my friend;" and springing upon him with a bound, he seized the pistol, thrusting his thumb between the hammer and the pan. The cock fell, but only cut the stout countryman's thumb; and wrenching it from the unsteady hand of the half-drunken man, Dick seized him by the shoulders, and forced him down into a seat.

"There," he said, "sit there quite still and listen to me, Master West. But first let me secure this;" and taking the other pistol from the table, he threw the powder out of the pans of both, and then proceeded, while the lawyer gazed at him with haggard eyes.

"Now, you are a smart rascal, are not you, West?" he said, "and you deserve right well that I should go and give you all up to justice. I think I should, too, although I should be sorry to overhear men's conversation, and then betray it, except to prevent greater crimes. But I think I should—nay, I am certain I should—if I were not quite sure that all of you, with hardly an exception, are as much fools as knaves. This is all braggadocio talk, Master West, and will end in smoke. You will meet and talk treason, and perhaps in the end get yourselves hanged; but you will do nothing, if they let you go on till Doomsday. There are only two of you, of whom I have any doubts. That man you call Colonel, I think he might do more, for he has got a head, and is not such a braggart as the rest. Then there is another they called Hone. He is such an idiot that he might commit any

crime from pure folly. All the others are swaggering villains, whose best punishment would be a cudgel. But mark you now, my good friend: are you sober enough to listen?"

"Yes, yes," answered the lawyer, "I am sober enough now."

"Well then, mark you, as I said," continued Dick Myrtle. "Do you take care that this does not go beyond swagger. I shall stay in London, and keep my eye upon you. I will know every movement of one-half of your people; and if I see the least preparation for this being carried beyond idle talk, you shall all be in Newgate within an hour. If you follow my advice, you are safe: keep them in play; let them gossip; but beware how you let them take one step towards action. And now, good-night; I shall hurry on to get before Keeling to his house; for I will give him and some of the others a fright, to keep them from further folly."

West started up and seized his arm, eagerly. "You will not tell them you were here?" he cried; "they will murder me!"

"Have I not said I will not betray you, if you do not play the fool?" answered Dick Myrtle; and casting off his hold, he unlocked the door, and walked down stairs, finding his way as best he could along the steep unlighted descent, and thence through the narrow lanes and manifold turnings of the Temple, his recollection of which was very imperfect, till at length he found himself in the busy streets again.

CHAPTER XXV.

LORD ALCESTER had passed a dull and heavy day. The evening of his return from Ellerton Castle had been stormy to all within his house; for he was disappointed at every point, and he was not a man either to bear disappointment with masculine fortitude, while feeling it severely, or to sink into himself and conceal the bitterness of his heart under a calm exterior. There was too much of the child in his character, and his petulance always required an object on which to expend itself. The great, the wealthy, the fortunate, of this world, know not what children they are to those who view them philosophically. Take one of them, and reason with him. You will find his intellect good, his judgment sound, his education high, perhaps his talent superior; and yet in how many things he is still a child—in his impatience of contradiction, in his irritation under disappointment, in his high estimation of trifles, in his fondness for toys and sweets, in his supercilious contempt, or still more supercilious condescension, for all that he considers inferior to himself—for

the good things he cannot understand—for the high things he is incapable of estimating. In all this he is a child. His toys and sweets may not come from the toyman or the confectioner, but they are more dangerous, and cloy sooner; and as for superciliousness, there is nothing so much so as a spoiled boy.

Such was Lord Alcester, though he thought himself a man, and a great one; and whenever aught went amiss, he was sure to vent his anger upon all innocent and unresisting things, as a child beats the ground upon which it has fallen and hurt itself. But there was something more in his present irritation. He had been somewhat proud, and a good deal vain of his vices: all weak men are. There had seemed to him something fine in fashionable wrong; but the words of Emmeline had shown that others could view the case differently. She had lowered his pride, wounded his vanity, shaken his self-satisfaction. She had taught him, and he felt it fiercely, that there were people who could look upon Lord Alcester as a very poor and pitiful being, to be schooled and lectured like a boy. It was with a bitter heart, then, that he returned; and the effect of Emmeline's words, as so constantly happens with women's exhortations to men, produced, in the first instance at least, a result directly opposite to that which she wished and sought. To every servant in the house, he showed himself irritable and violent; but to poor Henrietta Compton, his demeanor was more harsh and cold than ever.

The first inquiry he made was, whether Sir Frederick Beltingham had returned?—and when he learned that such was not the case, and hour after hour went by without his appearing, suspicion, not anxiety for his friend, began to take possession of his mind. He had not asked for Henrietta; he had not been yet to see her; but now he hurried up to her apartments, and his first salutation was a sharp demand if she knew where Sir Frederick Beltingham had gone?

"How should I know, Alcester?" she asked, in much surprise. "Did he not go with you?"

"You are well aware he did," answered Lord Alcester; "but that does not show that you are ignorant of where he is. A woman never gives a straightforward answer."

The colour rose in Henrietta's cheek, and her brow contracted with indignation. The worm felt inclined to turn upon the heel that crushed it. "Had I chosen to give you anything but a straightforward answer, Lord Alcester," she said, "I might have told you things less pleasant for you to hear. I might have told you what I suspect, when you only asked for what I knew."

"And pray, what do you suspect?" asked her companion; "I must know, so speak at once."

"I suspect," said Henrietta, sternly, "that a man's guide in falsehood and dishonour often becomes his personal rival in the pursuit, and that the master out-manœuvres the pupil."

Lord Alcester looked at her with fury; but words were wanting to reply; and turning hastily away, he left her, and paced the large hall below more than an hour. When supper was served, in the room where we have already seen the young nobleman and his guests engaged in the enjoyment of some of those pleasures of sense which they so sedulously cultivated, Lord Alcester walked thither alone; and when the page asked if he should inform Mrs. Compton, he replied sharply, "No."

"Her woman is below, my lord," said the boy, "inquiring if you expect her."

"Tell her I do not," answered Lord Alcester. "She did not choose to appear when I had guests, and now I do not desire her to do so. Tell her all I say."

The boy bowed low and withdrew; and the young nobleman sat and thought, with bitter satisfaction, that he had mortified one who loved him; that he had punished her for confirming the reproachful suspicions of his own heart. He understood well that Henrietta had repented of the stinging words she had spoken, as soon as they were uttered, and that she had sought to make atonement; and he triumphed in the thought of the pain which his refusal to be reconciled would inflict.

The next morning, at breakfast, however, Henrietta appeared, without inquiry, and took her accustomed place. He received her coldly, and hardly seemed to see her at first; but Henrietta had assumed a totally different air and tone from that which she had lately suffered to appear. She was dressed with scrupulous grace and care; her face, though still pale, bore no traces of the silent tears so frequently seen upon it. Her lip during the meal often wore a smile, not forced, not affected, but calm and natural; and two or three times she woke him from his reverie, by asking him some indifferent question. When he raised his eyes and looked at her, he thought her very beautiful again; old feelings began to revive, but he smothered them, and answered sharply and with brevity. At length, when he had concluded his breakfast, he rose and was sauntering away, when Henrietta's voice made him pause for a moment.

"Lord Alcester," she said, "I wish a few moments' conversation with you."

"I have not time, now," he answered; "I have business on hand."

"Any time to-day or to-morrow will do," replied Henrietta, calmly.

"I do not know that either to-day or to-morrow I shall have time to spare," rejoined the peer.

"I fear, my lord, you must find it," said Henrietta; "for early on the third day I depart for London."

"Depart!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my lord," she answered; and left the room.

"Pooh, nonsense!" cried Lord Alcester; but he then felt that he loved her; and his heart sank at the very thought of the possibility of her leaving him. He was not without acute perceptions, though they had been dulled by easy-won success; he was not incapable of strong attachments, though vice and indulgence had weakened the powers of the heart.

His first impressions were generally truest and best; for both with thought and feeling, when suddenly called upon, nature will often act before habit wakes up to rule. His first conviction, in the present instance, was, that Henrietta would go. He saw the total change of her manner; he saw that there was something like relief in her whole demeanor; and his mind instantly grasped the idea—not as if by a train of reasoning, but as a sudden impression—that there had been a struggle in her mind whether she should stay or go, that his conduct had brought the struggle to an end, that her resolution was taken, and that her mind was relieved of the burden of the contest. It did not last long, however, this impression. Pride and vanity took arms; and worldly cant, which is the worst of all kinds, because the most dangerous, came to their aid.

"She thinks to frighten me," he said to himself; "to make me bow and cringe before her, and she manages the matter skilfully enough; but she shall find herself mistaken. When she discovers that I treat her threats with contempt, and her preparations for going with indifference, she will soon show a humbler port. I will not let her see that it rests upon my mind for a moment;" and, ordering his horse, he rode out with several of his servants, determined, if possible, to trace out the proceedings of Sir Frederick Beltingham; and if he found that his pretended friend had really dealt treacherously with him, to seek instant vengeance.

He had not been long gone, and Henrietta was seated in her room alone, when there came a low knock at her door. Thinking it was one of the servants, she said, "Come in;" the moment the door opened, she started up, on beholding

the tall and graceful figure of the juggler standing in the door-way, but not entering.

"Not here, not here!" she cried, giving a hasty glance round the room as she advanced towards him, "I will speak with you in the corridor, or the hall, but not here."

"Fear not, lady," said the juggler, in a kind and respectful tone, "I was not about to come in. I am not one to make you feel for a moment, that the wronged lose reverence. Let us go anywhere you will, that our conference may not have the appearance of bashful secrecy, but yet where we are not likely to be interrupted, for we may have to talk long."

"How did you find your way in?" asked the lady, coming forth, and closing the door of the bed-room behind her. "Did none of the servants see you?"

"Some might," replied the juggler; "but, methinks, no one here would stop me."

"We will converse in the gardens," she said, hastily. "He is gone out for the present; but no one can tell when he may return; and it were dangerous for you to be found here."

"Fear not, fear not," said the juggler, with a smile. "Were he to return this moment, he has no more power to harm me than an infant. Lady, I am above his reach; and those whom I protect need not fear him. But, come, let us to the gardens; it is as well there as anywhere else. I love to walk and converse among the bright children of the early year. Silent, yet eloquent in their soft sweetness, they speak of God's love and bounty, who not only made earth, but made it beautiful,—who not only formed our habitation here, but decked it with all loveliness."

"Stay, I will fetch my veil, and be with you in a moment," replied Henrietta; and entering her room again, she cast the thin web of lace over her dark shining hair, and then returning to the corridor, descended the stairs with the juggler, crossed the great hall, and threading some narrow passages beyond, issued out with him into the private gardens of the house.

Those gardens had been laid out many years before, according to the taste of a preceding period. Terraces and walks—stone-urns and statues—arbours and labyrinths—with the prim parterres glowing with many-coloured flowers, and formed into arabesques of every shape and pattern, occupied the whole space within four large brick walls. Choosing her way to the left, on entering, Henrietta mounted a flight of stone steps, to a terrace which ran under a southern wall, and seated herself on a bench to recover breath; for she was agitated and her heart beat fast. The juggler stood beside her, and gazed down upon her thoughtfully; but for a moment

or two, both were silent; and, at length, the lady spoke first, saying, "I know not who you are, sir, but I know you have extraordinary powers; and there is something convincing in your words, which does not let me doubt you. I received your letter late last night; and how you knew that I have been present, and witnessed the strange delusions you performed—if they were delusions—I cannot tell; for I was in the latticed gallery, and you could not see me. But such was the conviction which your letter brought to my mind—such the influence which your language had on me—that I felt calmed and strengthened, and took the resolution which you prompted. Nay, more, I have acted upon it, and have announced my determination to depart."

"What said he?" demanded the juggler.

"He seemed surprised at first," replied the lady; "but then, I think, I heard a scoff. I waited not, however, to hear; for I was afraid my calmness might forsake me, though it is wonderfully increased since my determination was formed."

"You will find it increased still more when that determination is executed," said the juggler. "First will come peace of mind; for you will know you are doing what is right. Nay, shake not your head so sadly, poor Henrietta; the certainty that you are doing all you can to retrieve one error will daily and hourly be a balm to the wounds of memory. The past cannot be obliterated, but may be atoned; and with atonement comes peace. Your future fate may be uncertain; at least, in some respects. This young man, whom you still love, though he has worked hard for hatred, has prepared for himself against the future a day of sorrow and abasement, only comparable with that which he has inflicted on you. What the effect may be, none but the Seer of all hearts can tell; but he will have to drink to the very dregs a bitter cup; which, I trust, may prove medicinal, and purify his heart of pride and vanity, and that cold selfishness which is their natural offspring. Ay, to the very dregs must he drink it; and then, perhaps, in deep humiliation, he may learn to prize the jewels he has cast away, and seek to recover those within his reach."

Henrietta bent down her beautiful eyes, and gazed thoughtfully upon the ground. "I love him yet too well!" she murmured. "I love him yet too well!"

"Not well enough, I trust," said the juggler, "to let such love shake your resolution, even at the last moment. Remember, lady, that your fate is now in your own hands—that there are now no adverse circumstances against you—that the conduct of another does not now take from you all power to resist, but remain and be his slave. Whatever you do, it is

your own free choice, and the responsibility now rests with you alone."

"I forgive your doubting me," replied the lady; "my weakness in the past may well give cause for doubt. But fear not; my resolution is firm, and will not waver. Hitherto, I have had all against me. If I left him, think of all the dreadful things which went to compose the only fate before me. To be a friendless outcast, disowned by kindred, shunned by former acquaintances; to be a houseless, homeless wanderer, without one spot of earth, except the grave, on which to lay my head; to be a beggar in the common street, without the means of purchasing the food for one short day; or to labour at some yet unchosen task, in which a thousand more skilful hands, perhaps, would keep me from winning even bare existence; to go forth upon a world I know not, without guide or experience, loveless, helpless, hopeless. Had but one element of misery been taken away from this mass of adversity, I might have broken my bonds long ago. One element is taken away by your assurance; and I am no longer a slave, because I shall no longer be a beggar. I love him still—or perhaps it is I love the phantom of my own imagination, and cannot part, without a bitter pang, from that which represented it. But I will go; for the instant that I have the bare means of life elsewhere, I now feel I should be doubly criminal in staying here."

"And justly so," answered the juggler; "for you would not then have the strong plea of necessity."

"But yet," continued Henrietta, going on rapidly under the great excitement by which she was affected, "I feel like a long-caged bird, fearful to try my wings in flight. I do not doubt you, sir—no, not in the least; but I ask myself, how am I to prove my claim to this small property which you say descends to me from my grand-uncle? I never saw him—never knew him."

"It will be easily done," replied the juggler. "It would, had she lived, have descended to your mother——"

Henrietta put one hand over her eyes, and waved the other sadly, as if beseeching him not to pronounce that name again; and he proceeded. "It descends to you as the direct heir; and my lawyer will put you, without difficulty or opposition, in possession of your rights."

"But law is tedious, sir," said the lady, "and most uncertain too."

"It is, most undoubtedly," answered her companion; "and no law so uncertain or tedious as the English. It is framed by lawyers themselves, with niceties which benefit themselves alone. Yet in this case, lady, fear not; and to set your mind at rest, I will promise you, that should you fail in establishing

the claim which on my assurance you put in, a sum of five hundred pounds per annum shall be paid you for your life by the lawyer whose name I have here put down. Consult him as soon as you arrive in London, and he will insure you speedy right, for it is on his authority I speak and tell you, that you are Sir Archibald Winstay's heiress, and that none can dispute your right."

Thus saying, he put a packet of considerable bulk into her hand.

"What is this?" cried Henrietta; "It is very heavy," and a crimson blush, intense and painful, spread over her cheek. "Oh, sir, this is gold!"

"You have a long journey before you," said the juggler. "You may have to wait some days ere you can prove your claims and obtain your rights. It is but befitting, that when by my counsel you choose a painful and embarrassing course, I should provide the means."

"I never yet received gold from any man," said Henrietta, sadly: "My very food I have eaten here with pain; and these garments, on which we women set such store, have been provided from some jewels bequeathed to me by my father. I have still some trinkets left—enough, I think, to carry me hence, and provide the little that I want for a week or two."

"Nay, take it, dear lady," said her companion kindly; "take it, without fear or scruple. You may need it, or you may not; but if you find it burdensome, you can pay it back again when you are more rich. If you knew who it is that offers it, you would not refuse."

"If I may take it as a loan," she answered, "I will; but only as such, and under the firm assurance that your information is correct, and that I shall soon have means to pay it back again."

"You will, upon my honour," replied the juggler: "but let me add one word more. Your conduct now, dear lady, shows me that the judgment I had formed, on slight indications, perhaps, was nevertheless just. Henceforth, never say that you are friendless; for, on my truth, you shall ever find in me a brotherly regard. But your eyes fill with tears. Surely I have understood you right, and you will promise solemnly to me, to your own heart, to God above, never to return to Lord Alcester more."

"I wept to find I had a friend," said Henrietta, sadly; "but to your question, noble sir, I must answer, No. I do not promise—I have not promised that. I look upon myself as Lord Alcester's wife. He denies my title, and that, I think, after much reflection, justifies me in quitting him; but whenever he comes to claim me as his wife, and admits me to be

such in the eyes of all the world—in a word, when he proclaims me such at the altar, then I return—oh, with what joy!—but never until then, so help me God!”

“Enough! enough!” replied the juggler; “that was all I meant; and, for my part, I will leave no means unused to bow that stubborn neck, till lowly at your feet he asks, as Heaven’s best gift, that love he has so long trampled under foot. And now, farewell! if you have need, I shall be near at hand for two days longer. You will hear of me at the cottage near the river, where you left one day a letter for Gertrude Ellerton.”

“For Gertrude Ellerton!” cried Henrietta, turning pale. “Was she the cottage girl?”

“Ay!” said the juggler; “even so; but he did not know it, or he would not have dared to do what he did. However, send thither if you need aid, and fear not for the consequences; for I tell you that, should need be, I can wither him like an autumn leaf in a moment. Now, adieu!” and, turning away, he left her.

With slow and thoughtful steps, Henrietta retrod her way to her own chamber; and when there, she sat down and wept for some time. She calmed herself at length, and then, with the aid of her woman, commenced her preparations for departure. All that Lord Alcester had given her, every little trinket and memorial but one—his picture—she put apart to leave behind her; and in so doing, she often felt the tears struggling to rise up; but she would not let them flow; and when her task was ended, she sat down and thought of many things which restored her firmness, if not her cheerfulness. Then she gazed forth from the windows which looked over the wide park; but if it was for Lord Alcester she looked, it was in vain. He came not home during the whole morning. She dined alone, and in the quiet solitude found calm relief; so that when just at nightfall, he did at length return, she was not less composed than in the morning. Nor was he less irritable. He hardly seemed to see her, though she met him in the dining hall, and ordering supper soon after he arrived, barely paid her the courtesy due to any woman. Everything was displeasing to him; or he affected, perhaps, to think it so, to show her that her determination could work no effect on him. Every servant again felt his ill temper, and everything that was set before him was condemned.

Henrietta bore it all, at least externally, with wonderful patience and calmness. She made no reply to his sharp words, she did not seem even to feel them; and Lord Alcester began to entertain a doubt whether indifference were

not, on her part, succeeding to love. The very thought drove him almost to fury; and when, after supper was completely over—not a moment before—she rose and with a calm “Good-night, my lord,” glided gracefully and tranquilly out of the room, he started up, and with a hurried and agitated step, paced the floor, asking himself whether he should follow her or not. He refrained, however, for pride was still too strong, and he thought, “She will not be able to maintain it long.”

About ten o'clock on the following day, he was seated in a small back room, reading a letter which had just been brought to the house by a man on horseback, dressed in the colours of the Earl of Virepont's household. His eye was straining eagerly upon the paper, and he had nearly reached the bottom of the third page when Henrietta entered, and seeing his occupation, sat down to wait till he had done. Everything in her appearance was the same as the day before; the serene look, the same scrupulously graceful dress (if I may use such a term), the same expression of relief in her face; and when Lord Alcester laid down the letter on the table and gazed at her, he wondered to see her look so beautiful.

“What do you want, madam?” he asked, abruptly.

“To speak a few moments with you, my lord,” replied the lady.

“I have no time now,” he said, somewhat less vehemently than the day before. “I am obliged to go out to Ellerton Castle, and may not be back to-night.”

“Then the more need, Lord Alcester, that I should say what I have to say at once,” answered Henrietta, still calm and firm, “as we shall not meet again.” She paused upon the last words, uttering them slowly and distinctly, and then added more rapidly, “What I have to say will not occupy two minutes.”

“I hate a scene,” cried Lord Alcester, rising impatiently.

“And so do I,” replied the lady. “There need be none, and will be none on my part. What I have to say is simply this, that you will find all the jewels and trinkets which you have ever given me, in the ebony cabinet in my chamber. There is the key.”

“Well,” said Lord Alcester, taking it deliberately; “anything more?”

“Yes,” answered Henrietta; “you have at different times written me many letters, all of which I preserved as long as I loved and was loved. Two of those letters may be needful to me as a palliation of some faults; and those I keep. All

the rest are now valueless to me, and I have brought them to him who wrote them. There they are;" and she spread them out on the table before him.

He gazed at her for a moment, with a look of hesitation. It was doubtful whether he would burst forth into fury, or cast himself into her arms; but he made an effort, and said sternly, "All or none, Henrietta."

"No, my lord," she answered; "certainly not all——"

She had not finished the sentence when a servant suddenly entered the room, with a small ill-folded note in his hand, saying, "In haste from Sir Frederick Beltingham, my lord."

Lord Alcester took the paper from his hand, and tearing it open, read. His face changed, the evil spirit evidently gained the ascendancy, and he exclaimed aloud, "Mortally wounded, at the very moment he had tracked her out for me! Order my horse.—Tell Blackman and Murgatroyd, they go with me.—Quick! Away!"

He then turned an angry look upon Henrietta, swept all the letters off the table with his hand, and exclaiming "There!" set his foot upon them, with a fierce trampling step, and left the room.

The lady gathered them carefully up, and retired at once to her own chamber. Her face, air, manner, were all calm when she passed the door; but then bolting it, she cast the letters upon the table, and falling on the bed, remained like one dead for nearly an hour.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Josiah Keeling approached his own door, though the punch had obtained less power over his limbs and wits than it had done in the case of West, the lawyer, yet it had produced a certain effect, which all sorts of spirituous liquors have upon the minds of certain persons. It had raised his courage; it had increased his dignity in his own eyes. He remembered that he had had the daring to attempt to arrest the Lord Mayor of London, in regard to the business of the Sheriffs; and on the strength of that bold act he thought himself a brave man. At that moment he forgot a matter which often returned awfully to his mind—namely, that for that very deed a Government prosecution was even then hanging over his head. He strutted on, then, towards his door with an important air, after having stopped for some minutes at a corner to talk with his companion Rouse, and accompanied him part of the way to his house. But as Mr. Keeling came suddenly within sight of his own dwelling, something occurred which destroyed his courage. As the

weight of an alarm runs suddenly down, with great agitation of all the bells and wheels connected with it, on a very slight touch of the spring, so, at the sight of a man standing quietly in the shadow near the door, Keeling's valorous feelings all gave way, with palpitation of heart and sinking of spirit. But he had no time either to consider what to do, or to run away, which was the first impulse, for the man walked straight up to him, saying, "How are you, Jos. Keeling? Your servant wench tells me you have been out all the evening; but I wanted to speak with you, and therefore waited till you came back."

Keeling looked at him like a shy horse, ready to start away from the hand. He knew not what to reply. He wished Dick Myrtle anywhere upon the earth, or under the earth, but there; and yet he did not venture to tell him so. His silence continued so long, however, that it became unpleasant; and Dick Myrtle exclaimed, "What is the matter, Keeling? Are you drunk? Don't you know me? Come, open the door, and let us go in: I have something to say to you."

"It is very late for visitors, Master Myrtle," said Keeling, at length. "Can you not call to-morrow?"

"Not I, Keeling," replied Dick Myrtle. "You had better open the door, my good friend, or I'll bawl out what I have to say in the street, and see how you like it."

Keeling sullenly opened the door of his house with a private key; and Dick Myrtle walked in first. His companion directed him to a room to the left, upon the ground floor, and felt, while he called for a light, a strong inclination to lock him in, and run away as fast as possible. But, conscious that the very act would betray guilt, he so far commanded himself as to return with a candle, and seat himself opposite to his acquaintance, though it must be confessed his face was pale, and his lip quivered.

"Now, Master Keeling," said Dick Myrtle, "as I see that my visit is not very pleasant to you, I will say what I have to say to you in a very few words, and leave you. You will remark, however, that I say it as a friend, and therefore I ought to have a better reception."

"I shall soon see whether you are a friend or not," answered Keeling. "I do not understand what it all means, your following me up to London, after having met me down at Mornington and hollaring out my name, when you might very well see I did not want it to be known. That was not very friendly, I think."

"Yes, it was," replied his companion; "I did it to prevent your going on in a dangerous course, Master Keeling."

And as to friendship, do not I show it very strongly, when I could have you hanged, drawn, and quartered to-morrow, by coming to give you quiet advice, not to go on any more in the way you are going on, but to quit the scoundrels with whom you are associating, and live a tranquil and peaceable life. You are already likely to be half ruined by a fine for what you have done ; and now you are putting your neck into a halter, from which you will not get it out in a hurry."

Keeling sat before him as if he were turned into stone ; and as he made no reply, Dick Myrtle went on,—“ Come, come, Master Keeling,” he said, “ do not give way to fear more than necessary ; but for your own good, keep yourself free from traitors ; throw cold water upon their plot, if they speak to you about it any more, and tell them plainly you have thought better of it. Now that is the warning I had to give you. But let me add a word or two more, my good friend : Do not go and tell them that they are found out, and that Dick Myrtle knows all about it ; for there are many amongst them—such fellows as Holme and Hone, and others—who would not scruple to do things, in the fear of being detected, which would make me treat them and you as you deserve, but as I am unwilling to treat you. My advice is, keep quiet yourself ; advise them, if you can, to think better of the matter ; and, at all events, hold your tongue. Now, good-night to you. My say is said."

Thus saying, he took up his hat, and walked out of the room, with some contempt at the abject and powerless terror which was visible in Keeling's countenance

The unhappy plotter, when his monitor had left him, sat for nearly half an hour exactly in the same position, with his eyes staring and his mouth partly open, while fear and confusion took possession of his brain. It was evident that the man who had just left him was fully aware of the whole plot. He had named two of his fellow-conspirators,—he had displayed information which they had all thought impossible to be obtained by any person beyond their own circle. Might not others have discovered their practices likewise ? Even if Dick Myrtle did not betray them, might not those from whom he had obtained intelligence give them all up to justice ? Such questions could receive but one answer ; and terror took entire possession of the man's mind. Everything else was forgotten : honour, good faith, hatred to the Government, the principles and views of his whole life, were not thought of. Safety—safety was the only object he now had in view. The prison, and the scaffold, and the executioner were present to his sight all night ; and when he rose the next day,

with a pale face and haggard eyes, he saw them still; nor could he rest satisfied till he had done something to attain the great object of his heart,—security.

The impulsion was upon him; he could not resist it. It was a thirst; it was a passion. Security was as a well to the camel in the desert; he snuffed it from afar—he rushed towards it—nothing could stop him; and the moment he had finished his breakfast, he hurried forth into the street, and took his way direct to the house of the Earl of Dartmouth, who had some slight knowledge of him, from business connected with the city.

The great man was not up when he arrived, and he was kept for nearly an hour in the outer hall, impatient, full of trepidation, thinking every moment that some one would come in and say, “The plot is discovered.”

At length he was summoned to Lord Dartmouth, and found him in a brocaded dressing-gown, and slippers embroidered with silver. “What is it you want with me, Master Keeling?” said Lord Dartmouth, as soon as he saw him, without asking him to sit down. “It should be business of great importance to bring you out so early in the morning.”

“It is, my lord,” answered Keeling. “I have come to your lordship to reveal a plot of the most terrible character, which is even at this moment going on in London, for——.”

“Pooh, pooh!” said Lord Dartmouth; “we have already had too many plots, Keeling. Those engines won’t work now. There is nothing to be got out of them.”

“But this is no imaginary plot, my lord,” answered Keeling; “and I am ready to prove every word I say. Nor do I ask for anything but pardon and safety for myself.”

“Well, if it is a real plot, and a sound one, you must go to Jenkins, the secretary. He is the plot man,” said Lord Dartmouth, with a laugh. “I will have nothing to do with it. So long as I keep my own skin safe, I don’t care much whose hide suffers.”

“But, perhaps, he won’t see me, my lord,” said Keeling.

“Tell him you came from me,” replied Lord Dartmouth.

“Or, stay, I will write him a line;” and dipping a pen in the ink before him, he scrawled down on a piece of paper the following words:—

“MR. SECRETARY,

“I send you by the bearer a very fine plot, fresh and in good condition. It may keep, with care, perhaps a fortnight, when, if well cooked, with the proper sauce, it may give

satisfaction; and begging your kind acceptance of the same,

"I have the honour to be,

"Mr. Secretary,

"Your humble servant and friend,

"DARTMOUTH."

"There," he said, twisting up the note, addressing it, and throwing it across the table to Keeling; "send him that, and he will soon see you. So good-morning;" and nodding his head nonchalantly, he looked towards the door.

Keeling, taking the hint, departed forthwith, and hurried away towards Whitehall, where he asked for, and speedily found, the office of the Secretary of State. Here, however, he was destined to wait nearly as long as he had been kept at Lord Dartmouth's, for to his inquiries the reply was, that the secretary was busy, and nobody would take in the note to him till a hand-bell rang sharply, and one of the clerks, snatching the paper from him, ran away with it into an inner room. A minute or two after he received a summons to appear before the secretary, whom he had never yet seen, and going in he found a little neatly-made man seated near a table, with his feet resting on a footstool.

"What is this, sir?" said Jenkins. "My Lord Dartmouth is pleased to be facetious. I don't know any plots, nor have I got any cooks to dress them, like my Lord Shaftesbury."

"I don't know what Lord Dartmouth has written, sir," replied Keeling; "but this matter is no joke, I can assure you."

"Well, what is it, man? what is it?" said Jenkins, impatiently. "Don't keep one waiting for a good thing."

"All I want, sir, is to be assured of pardon," said Keeling. "I vow and protest I have only entered into these things for the sake of divulging them."

"You must throw yourself on his Majesty's clemency," said the secretary, more gravely; but instantly changing his tone again, he added, "You may reckon upon a good deal, as in this business you have got the start of all others; and in the matter of pardon, as in everything else, it is first come first served."

Keeling seemed to hesitate; and Jenkins, beginning to suspect, from the man's manner, that the affair might be more serious than he had at first imagined, said, sternly, "You know that his Majesty's clemency is great to a repentant offender; but you will understand that I do not suffer you to quit this place without making a full disclosure, now that you have acknowledged that a serious plot does exist."

"I was only thinking, sir," replied Keeling, in a humble tone, "of how I should begin my statement."

"Oh, very well," said Jenkins; "if you are resolved to go on, I will have in a clerk and take your deposition; but let me warn you to adhere strictly to the truth, for we have had too many sham plots, and we are tired of them."

"I will keep strictly to the truth, sir," replied Keeling; "but my conscience would not let me rest till I had told all."

"You will find your conscience has been your best friend," said Jenkins; and ringing his bell again, a clerk immediately appeared. "Sit down there Mr. Basset, and take this person's deposition from his own mouth."

"My name is Josiah Keeling," said the deponent.

"What, he who tried to arrest the Lord Mayor?" exclaimed the secretary.

"The same, sir," answered Keeling, the blood mounting up into his face.

"Well, we must try to quash that matter for you, if this proves really important," said the secretary. "Go on;" and Keeling proceeded to give all the particulars of the famous Rye House plot, with which he was thoroughly acquainted; exposing the dark schemes of the conspirators, both as regarded a general insurrection, and the assassination of the king and the Duke of York. The matter grew in importance every moment in the eyes of the secretary; and when at length Keeling stated that several persons of the highest importance were more or less implicated, and named Lords Russell, Grey, Essex, Howard, and the Duke of Monmouth, Jenkins started up with a good deal of agitation, exclaiming, "Stay! explain yourself more fully. Have any of these noblemen been present at your meetings?"

"No; I can't say they have," said Keeling; "but communications have been held with them by the means of Rumsey, Ferguson, and the others I have mentioned."

"Have letters passed?" asked Jenkins.

"No, no writing," answered Keeling; "at least, not that I know of."

Several more questions were asked, and when the depositions were complete and the interrogatories answered, the secretary, leaning his head upon his hand, remained in thought for some five or ten minutes, while Keeling stood before him with a downcast apprehensive look, waiting to know his fate.

"We can make nothing of this deposition," said Jenkins at length, taking the papers from the clerk, "I doubt not, after Keeling, that your deposition is all true; but it is of no use to us unless it be confirmed by the testimony of an-

other. Two witnesses are absolutely necessary in cases of high treason; and I can make no engagements as to yourself, unless you can induce some other person as lightly implicated in the plot as possible, to follow the course that you have adopted, and confirm your evidence."

Keeling looked down for a minute or two with evident mortification and disappointment. To have told all, to have betrayed his comrades, to have endangered the lives of some twenty or thirty of his most intimate friends, and yet not even to have obtained a promise of pardon himself, at first quite overwhelmed him; but after remaining in stupid silence for a time, he suddenly looked up with a start and a smile of satisfaction, saying, "You shall have it—you shall have it this very day—I know how I can manage it."

"Well, Master Keeling," said Jenkins, "I shall leave you at liberty, that you may obtain this confirmation if you can; and if you do, I think I can promise you his Majesty's grace, but remember I have my eye upon you, and any attempt to escape would be frustrated."

"I shall make none, sir," answered Keeling, "but trust entirely to the king's clemency. As to another witness, you shall have one; to-night, I trust, if not to-morrow, without fail."

When Keeling reached the street, his very brain seemed to whirl with agitation; but hurrying along the Strand with a quick step, he made his way back to the city, and directed his steps without pause to a large shop of ironware, on the door post of which was painted, "John Keeling;" passing through the shop, in which several men were buying and selling, he entered the warehouse behind, and there in a little boarded counting-house he found a man, who bore a considerable resemblance to himself, though the complexion was more ruddy, and the expression more frank.

"Why, what is the matter, brother Josiah?" said the tradesman, laying down his pen, and looking over his spectacles at the agitated countenance of his brother.

"Why, John," answered Keeling, "I want to know if you are very busy just now, for I have something of great importance to talk to you about."

"No, I have nothing to do just now," replied the tradesman; "I was only summing up these old accounts."

"Then come with me," said his brother, "for there is something in hand upon which the safety of the country may depend, and a stop may thereby be put to the progress of arbitrary power."

"God grant it!" said John Keeling, taking down his hat from a peg behind him, "but yet don't you do anything rash or wicked, Josiah."

"That is just what I want you to give me your opinion upon," rejoined his more crafty brother; "you shall hear what some people in London propose to me, from the mouth of one of them. You know Goodenough, who was under-sheriff in Bethel's year?"

"I know who he is," answered John Keeling, "but I never had anything to do with him."

"Well, just come with me and hear what he says," replied his brother; "if you think their scheme a good one, and worthy of being followed in a righteous cause, John, I will go on with it; and if not, I will stop short; but we must make haste, for I have got to go afterwards to Westminster about this affair of arresting the mayor."

Perhaps John Keeling might think it somewhat extraordinary that his brother should place so much reliance on his judgment in this instance, when he did not usually consult him on any of his affairs; but nevertheless he walked on with him to the house of Goodenough, the ex-sheriff, where they were immediately admitted to a private audience. At first Mr. Goodenough looked somewhat askance at John Keeling, for those were days of suspicion; and although the worthy ex-sheriff was by no means a cautious or a prudent man, he was not fond of new faces. Josiah Keeling soon removed all doubts by saying, "This is my brother John, sir, a solid man, and as great an enemy of tyranny and oppression, either social, political, or religious, as any of us. He is very anxious to hear from you what are the plans and purposes entertained. He may give us immense assistance if he approves, and at all events he is fully to be trusted."

"Sir," said John Keeling, "there is no man in the realm more ready to stand forward in defence of civil and religious liberty, or to shed his blood for it, should it be needful, than myself. I lament the state into which the country has fallen, and will be backward in nothing which can restore us to a blessed state of freedom."

Goodenough shook him heartily by the hand, and in the course of half an hour's conversation, divulged to him the whole of those wild, vague, and desperate schemes, which had been contrived in the secret assemblies of the conspirators. John Keeling's countenance fell visibly, but he did not comment much upon what he heard, saying, merely, "Armed resistance to authority usurped or misused, I have always thought lawful; but the secret shedding of blood, sir, upon any provocation, is more doubtful. I must think over it—I must think over it;" and taking a hasty leave, he retired with his brother.

"Have nought to do with them, Josiah," he said, when

they reached the street; "have nought to do with them. These are murderers, not patriots."

"But let us talk the matter over, John," said his brother. "Come on with me towards Westminster, for I am late."

"Part of the way I will go," answered the other, "but I must soon turn back."

His brother, however, contrived to lure him on, protracting the discourse till they had passed the gardens of Suffolk House, and were approaching White Hall, when John Keeling stopped, saying he must return.

"No, no; come on with me but a few steps further," replied his brother. "I am going to see if I cannot compound the matter of that unfortunate business in regard to arresting the Lord Mayor, and a word or two from you may be of great service. If they are extreme with me, I am a ruined man."

"Well, Josiah, well, as far as words will go," answered John Keeling; "but mind, no money, no security. You are not to be trusted Josiah, when you get into one of your rash fits."

"Neither money nor security do I need, upon my word, my good brother," answered the other; "all you have in the world would not cover this, if they go on. It is to stop them I want. Here is the door."

As soon as he appeared in the office with another man, the clerk who had taken his deposition, bustled to admit them to the secretary. But what was John Keeling's surprise and indignation, when his brother said, with a low brow, "This is my brother, John Keeling, Mr. Secretary. He has, within this half hour, heard from Mr. Goodenough's own lips, everything concerning the plot for insurrection and assassination, conformable to my deposition this morning."

"Oh, Josiah!" cried his brother, giving him a glance of angry grief.

"Is what he says true, sir?" demanded the secretary, sternly.

John Keeling was silent; and Jenkins repeated, "Is it true, sir? Remember the concealment of treason is the same as the offence. Is it true, I say?"

"It is!" replied John Keeling, with a sigh.

"Then swear him, and take his deposition, Mr. Basset," said the secretary; and John Keeling took the oath, and related all that had passed.

"That is sufficient," said Jenkins, when this was done. "We have now two competent witnesses. You may consider yourself safe, Master Keeling; but come hither tomorrow for instructions how to act. I must hasten to lay these depositions before the council."

John Keeling hurried out of the secretary's office, and Josiah following, attempted to take his arm ; but the former shook him off indignantly, exclaiming aloud, much to the admiration of several persons passing, " Hence ! You are an abomination to me ! "

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE yellow light streamed misty down the long irregular streets of London, on a fine early summer morning. The shade and sunshine, the large houses, now projecting, now retreating, the quaint shops which here and there presented themselves, the steeples rising blue over the roofs, the occasional groups of matutinal wanderers crossing from corner to corner, the innumerable signs which in those days decorated most of the London shops, and here and there the thin lines of a scaffold where some building was undergoing repair, formed a picture not perhaps quite beautiful, but yet pleasant and interesting to the eye. Such was the scene when looking to the West, from one of the highest points of the City of London, whence the eye ranged all the way down those lines of houses which then occupied the slope of Ludgate Hill. Many changes have undoubtedly taken place since that time ; the forms, the size of the houses are very different, the principal streets broader and better arranged, though even then they had undergone much improvement ; but still the principal line of street was there, as it is now, running down from St. Paul's to Farringdon. To the east another scene presented itself, more lively, and perhaps more striking ; for the hard-handed artizan of those days, as of the present, was the earliest riser of the capital, and an immense number of labourers were now collected in the wide open space comprising St. Paul's Churchyard, and many of the streets round about it. In the centre of that space, already beginning to tower up high in air, appeared gigantic masses of stonework, huge walls, and towers, and columns, looking more vast and imposing in their unfinished state than they have ever done since. The symmetry of the complete work has taken away from the grandeur of the parts. Of pure white, unblemished by the smoke and dust of years, the splendid building, looking like a city rising rapidly from the ground, would have been almost too colourless, had it not been for the long deep shadow cast westward by the rising sun, and for the golden hues of morning falling over the whole, imparting a mysterious purple mistiness with the shades, and imparting a rich but chastened splendour to the cold stone itself. At every part of the building, and in the open space

around, innumerable workmen were seen busily hewing blocks or placing stones in position, and a number of women and children were wandering about amongst them, carrying the brown bread and the beer, of which the workmen's breakfast then usually consisted, to father, son, or brother.

A window in a house on the eastern side of this space, commanded a view of the whole scene, and at that window a lady had been seated from the dawn of day. During the whole night, with the exception of one short hour, sleep had not visited the eyes of Henrietta Compton. A step had been taken which she had ever revolved, but always shrank from with dread. The energy of exertion and the stimulus of indignation had subsided, and she now felt all the loneliness of her situation, all the painful results of the resolution she had so firmly executed, before the more balmy and peace-giving effects could be experienced.

She rose early, weary of her sleepless bed; and although she would not—perhaps she could not—weep, yet a dull, despairing heaviness oppressed her, and with faint and sorrowful eyes she gazed out upon all the sights of the morning, drawing from everything she saw sad images, where a happier heart would have found many a pleasant fancy. Life was without an object, the dream of love was at an end, the whole world seemed to her a desert, and men's thickest haunts the most lonely part of the great wilderness. The multitude of houses, the moving figures, the merry laugh which sometimes rose up to her ear, the soft breath of the summer air, the golden sunshine itself,—all was sad to her, and spoke of loneliness and desolation. It was not that she was without perception of the harmonies of nature and of human life, but her own fate was the discord which jangled the sweet sounds. In all that busy beehive, in all those innumerable dwellings, in all that passing crowd, was there, she asked herself, one heart that loved or cared for her?

She sat there long before her meditations were interrupted in any sort; for the maid she had brought with her, in peace of heart, slept well and rose not with the dawn. At length, however, she entered to take her mistress's orders, and to assist her in dressing; she commented with some surprise upon her early rising, hoped that her mistress had not found her bed uneasy, for it was she who had recommended the lodging in the house of her own cousin, and declared she had never slept better in her whole life.

"Soft beds, Susan," answered the lady, "will not make easy heads and hearts; but you cannot understand that. I have you never seen—"

"Oh lord, ma'am!" said the girl, "there is no use in taking on so about anything, all things come right in the end."

"God grant it!" answered Henrietta to this light-hearted view of the case; "but go, my good girl, and see that the letter I gave you last night be taken to the Temple as soon as possible, and an answer brought back."

"Bless you, madam! you will find no lawyer up at this hour," answered Susan; "they are the laziest beasts that God ever made, lawyers, that is, because they have other people's business to attend to. If it were their own they would bustle about fast enough, I dare say. Better let me bring you something to break your fast with first, and then I will take the letter myself, though if I go before ten o'clock, I shall have to pull the man out of bed to answer it!"

Henrietta let her do as she would, but the food that was placed before her she could hardly taste, and turning to the window again she sat down and gazed with vacant eyes upon the multitudes passing below. The streets were by this time crowded; carriages, carts, and waggons, were rolling to and fro; men on horseback passed up and down; and here and there at that early hour a sedan chair or a hackney coach was seen proceeding westward to take a lawyer to the courts, or a city lady to air herself in the sunshine of the fashionable world. Henrietta scarcely saw them, she knew none of them, they were all without interest to her. Thus passed nearly an hour in dull apathy, but, at length, the maid came back and told her that the lawyer would be with her as soon as possible. "He seemed very glad, madam, to hear that you had come to London, for he said little could be done without your presence."

"Well, wait in the neighbouring room, my good girl," replied her mistress; "perhaps your testimony may be wanted to prove I am the person I represent myself to be; and in my improved fortunes, Susan, I will not forget your attachment to me in less prosperous days."

She sighed sadly while she spoke as if she felt that happiness did not accompany the improved fortunes that she mentioned.

"Well, I thought there was some luck toward you, madam," replied the woman, "the lawyer looked so glad; and they are never glad to hear of any one who has not money to give them."

Henrietta smiled faintly, and turned her eyes to the street once more, while the maid withdrew, as she had been told, to the neighbouring room. Hardly had five minutes elapsed, however, ere there came a knock at the chamber-door, and

when Henrietta bade the visitor enter, a tall, thin, sharp-visaged man appeared, dressed in deep mourning, who bowed low to Henrietta, then advanced a step, and bowed again without speaking.

"I presume I see Master Whitaker the attorney?" said the lady, at length. "Be seated, sir."

"The same, madam," replied the lawyer, drawing a seat to the table, and laying down a sort of satchel upon it. "You are, madam, I take it, Mistress Henrietta Compton, daughter of the late Sir William Compton, knight, and Dame Margaret Winstay, his wife."

"I am, sir," answered the lady, her eyes filling with tears at her parents' names.

"Pray, madam," continued the lawyer, "is there any person in London who can prove your identity with the lady so described?"

"Yes—my maid," replied Henrietta; "she has known me many years, since childhood."

"May she be called?" said Mr. Whitaker, still in the same grave tone.

"Assuredly," answered Henrietta; and raising her voice, she said, "Susan, come hither."

Where the maid's ear was, matters not, but she was with her mistress in a moment, making a low curtsy to the lawyer, who looked at her steadfastly for an instant, and then inquired, "Pray, young woman, who is this lady?"

"That is my mistress, sir," replied Susan, gladly. "Mistress Henrietta Compton, the daughter of Sir William Compton."

"And who are you?" asked the lawyer.

"My name is Susan Griesly," answered the girl; "I am first cousin to John Griesly, the grocer, down stairs."

The lawyer's whole manner changed in a moment. He rubbed his hands, and his small, sharp, but not unpleasant eyes, twinkled like stars, and a smile, that made his thin face look quite benevolent, came upon his lips. "That will do, that will do," he cried; "it was only necessary, my dear young lady, to have some one who, being a known person in this great city, could establish your identity. The maid will swear to you, her cousin will swear to the maid; and now I congratulate you with all my heart as heiress to all the lands and hereditaments of the late Sir Archibald Winstay. I am sorry to say the personals, which were very great, he left away; I know the fact, for I drew the will; they go to a fanatical old woman, and an anabaptist preacher; for the old man, who was miserly and rich, was beset by the greedy harpies of his own sect. The estate he could not meddle with, and it

is yours, as last in the entail made by your great-grandfather. First, he left it to your grand-uncle's brother, then on failure of issue, male or female, to your grand-uncle, then to your maternal grandfather, with remainder to his daughter then living and her issue. I have the deeds here in this bag, and as a freehold it passes to you without let or impediment."

Henrietta cast down her eyes towards the ground, and thought without reply.

"Why, you do not seem glad," said the lawyer; "you are as melancholy, lady, as if I had been telling you of some sad catastrophe."

"I have much cause for melancholy, sir," replied Henrietta.

"Ay, ay," rejoined the old man; "so I heard, so I heard. But there was something told me about letters which proved to be a contract. Ha, lady, can you let me see them?—will you let me look at them? There are strange things in law, dear lady. Law is a famous conjurer, which out of remnants of old parchment, or a few black strokes upon a linen rag, can raise spirits of power to frighten bad men from evil courses."

Henrietta mused, with the small delicate finger resting upon the fair blue-veined temple, and the colour varying in her cheek. "Leave us, Susan," she said at length; and when the maid was gone, continued gravely, "I seek not, sir, to force myself upon any man. I seek not even to establish in courts of law, or in the eye of the world, whatever rights those letters may give me; but for my own satisfaction, and for a fairer name when I am dead than I may now possess, I would fain know truly what construction men learned in such matters will put upon the terms which were used to deceive me. I will show you these letters, and you shall tell me what you think."

"Not I, not I," answered the lawyer. "You shall have an opinion from civilians and canonists. A lawyer's opinion, madam, is not worth a fig, except in his own particular branch of the profession. I have nothing to do with matrimony—never had; but let me have the letters, and as fast as I can make Doctor Doublesides go, you shall have the best opinion that the country affords. I should not wonder, however, if the young gentleman was more eager to prove the marriage than you are, when he finds what an inheritance has come to you."

His words were very painful to Henrietta, though she saw he meant them kindly and cheeringly. The very thought of being sought again for wealth when love and devotion had been slighted and betrayed, was offensive to her; but she

knew that the old man could not understand her emotions, and therefore she concealed them, answering in a matter-of-fact tone, "So paltry a sum could never be an object to him."

"A paltry sum!" cried the old lawyer, in a tone of surprise, almost amounting to indignation; "your ideas must be very vast, madam, to call a rental of two thousand a year a paltry sum."

"Two thousand a year!" cried Henrietta; "I had no idea that its amount was so large."

"I am within the figure," said the man of law; "and if you will come with your maid to my chambers to-morrow, I will show you the rent-roll and the plan. But now I must have the letters, for my time is precious."

Henrietta called her maid, and on her appearing said, "Bring hither the packet sealed up in the trunk mail; the lesser one with the silk round it."

She gave her a key as she spoke, and in about two minutes the maid returned with a packet in her hand; but, at the very moment she opened the door, Henrietta's cheek turned deadly pale.

"Hark!" she cried, "it is Alcester's step—it is Alcester's voice. Give this gentleman the letters, Susan," and returning to the lawyer she added, in a low and hurried tone, "Take them, take them, and away! Do not let him see them in your hands."

"Oh, no," cried the lawyer, slipping them into his bag, "he shall not see them. Good-morning, madam; pray remember to be with me at noon—to-morrow, and then——"

But as he spoke the door opened, and as, bowing low, Mr. Whitaker retired, Lord Alcester entered the room with a quick step and excited look.

"So," cried the young peer, "you thought you had concealed your abode from me, Henrietta."

"It were well for me, my lord, if I had done so," answered the lady, "for it would have saved me some pain, it appears; but I made no attempt of the kind, for I thought the parting was as satisfactory to you as it was to me; and that, therefore, I should not have to undergo the discomfort of seeing you again."

Lord Alcester gazed at her gloomily, and at length replied, "That is false,—it was not satisfactory, Henrietta. I know your heart. You cannot conceal it from me. I know what that calm demeanor cost you: I know what it costs you now."

"If you do, Lord Alcester," replied the lady, rising, "the more disgrace and dishonour to you for trampling on that

heart; the more shame to you for coming hither now. But you do not know my heart, and never have; otherwise you would see and understand, that, with fortitude and patience to bear a certain amount of injury and wrong unmurmuring, with love that nothing could quell but the knowledge of your thorough unworthiness, there came a point where it did become a satisfaction—not unmixed with bitterness, but a satisfaction still—to break the chain which had so long bound me, to spurn, as I had been spurned, and to abandon for ever a life of shame into which I had been partly led by deceit, partly forced against my will."

"And how will you live now?" demanded Lord Alcester.

"That is nought to you, my lord," said Henrietta; "you have renounced all right to rule my conduct or inquire into my actions. Rest satisfied, however, that I shall live by means neither disgraceful to Henrietta Compton, nor discreditable to a woman, who though she denies your right to direct her, as long as you deny her right to call herself your wife, has ever, will ever consider herself as such, in all that touches your honour and her own. And now, my lord, I insist upon your leaving me, for your presence here is an outrage."

"You insist!" cried Lord Alcester, with a scoff; "who was that quitted you just now?"

"That, my lord, you have no right to ask," answered the lady; "but to satisfy you as much as may be, it was my lawyer."

"Oh! you employ men of law, do you?" exclaimed the peer.

"I do," answered Henrietta.

There was a silence of a few moments, and then Lord Alcester said, "Against me, perhaps?"

"No, my good lord," replied Henrietta; "I am not so insensible of my own dignity. But I trust that your questions are at an end, for I am not disposed to answer any more; and I insist upon your leaving me at once."

"I do not choose," said the peer, sternly. "You must return with me, Henrietta. You are making yourself miserable, and me too."

"I will never return, Lord Alcester," answered the lady, "till, by every formal act, you sanctify and recognise in the sight of man that union which is already a marriage in the sight of God. But this, I know right well, you seek not to do,—I believe that you will never seek it, and therefore I desire you to leave me."

"What if I say No?" asked the peer.

"Then I shall be driven to force you," said Henrietta; "I

am not here without protection. I am in the house of a respectable citizen of London; and I shall not apply to the authorities of the city in vain to protect me from insult and injury, even though they be offered to a woman by a peer of England. I insist, my lord, that you go, and at once."

"I will not," replied Lord Alcester; and instantly raising her voice, Henrietta exclaimed, "Susan, call up your cousin, Master Griesly."

"Stay, stay!" cried the young nobleman; but the maid was gone on her errand ere she heard his call. "I will go when I have received back what is mine," he continued. "You have taken away a letter of mine—a letter addressed to me—which in my foolish haste, when last we met, I left upon the table in my book-room. It you must return at once, for it is a matter of much moment."

"I have it not," replied Henrietta. "I took up your own letters to me, which you passionately cast down, for I would not have menials read and know all that was once written by him who had so belied his own words; but I have none other."

"No evasion," cried Lord Alcester, sharply, hearing a step upon the stairs; "bring me the letter, I say, or I will fetch officers and search for it myself."

"If you dare, you may," cried Henrietta, with her eyes flashing brightly at the insult. "You are but seeking a pretext to treat me with indignity. Leave me, sir, at once, without more offence.—Oh, Master Griesly, I am glad you are here. This gentleman comes hither to insult me in your house. I crave your protection, and beg that if he does not instantly quit me, you would send to some justice of the peace for means to make him."

"Oh! I will soon make him, Mistress Compton," said stout John Griesly; "we have a constable next door, and do not suffer ruffling here. Do you choose to go at once, master?"

"You should say Lord Alcester," replied the peer, trying to browbeat him.

"Lord or no lord, you'll soon be in the compter, if you do not go," said the grocer, "you have your men at the door, I know; but we can deal with them too, methinks."

Lord Alcester glared at him furiously, as if doubtful how he should act: but there was a secret in his breast which counselled forbearance. He dared not have that letter which he sought for, seen by other eyes; and after pausing for a moment or two, he turned sharply round, and left the room and the house.

Henrietta made a sign to her maid to leave her, and, as soon as the girl and her cousin had retired, put her hankerchief to her eyes and wept bitterly.

"Two thousand a year?" said the grocer to Susan in a low voice, as soon as they were at the back of the door.

"Ay, John, not a penny less," answered the maid; "I heard the lawyer say it with my own ears."

"I don't wonder; then, that the young fellow is so sharp to get her back again," rejoined the cousin; "but he sha'n't, if I can help it."

In the meantime, Henrietta wept; and did not for many minutes recover her composure. When thought returned, however, her memory reverted to the scene with the letters, which had taken place between herself and Lord Alcester at Malwood; and she suddenly started up with a feeling of terror, as if she had committed a crime. She recollected that he had been reading a letter when she entered, that he had laid it down upon the table while he spoke with her and perused the note from Sir Frederick Beltingham, and that, in his fit of hasty passion, he had swept everything off the table at once, and trampled upon the papers. She remembered well, too, that she had picked them up, and put them by without looking at them; and she asked herself if she could have taken the letter he had been reading, too; if he might not now be in the right, and she in the wrong. She hurried instantly into the adjoining room, to which the maid had just returned, opened the trunk mail with hands trembling from agitation, and then suddenly exclaimed, "Susan, what have you done? You have given the lawyer the wrong packet. Here is that which I intended for him: the other larger packet is gone. Fly to him quick; take these, and bring the others back. They prove nothing. These are the important papers."

The girl excusing herself as well as she could, hastened to obey; and in less than an hour brought back to her mistress the packet of Lord Alcester's letters, which she had offered to give up to him at Malwood. Henrietta opened it eagerly, and looked over the papers one by one. She found none that was not in his hand and addressed to herself; and with a mind relieved from the apprehension of having, even inadvertently, wronged him, she sat down more calm, and waited for the turn of fate.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I WILL not take upon myself to say how many days Henrietta Compton had occupied in the journey to London; but the acute reader, who has noticed with scrupulous accuracy every event that has been hitherto related, will easily perceive—nay, has already perceived—that she could not have reached the

capital for two or three days after the arrival of Gertrude Ellerton. It is now my task to tell how those days had passed with the fair visitor at Lord Russell's house, Southampton Place; but I must do so very briefly. Indeed, one or two sentences will be sufficient.

The days had gone by in great happiness—such as she had not known for years. She had visited her father every night: Francis de Vipont was a tenant of the same house with herself, and high and happy love strewn the path of time with flowers. They sat together and dreamed the dreams of young affection; they conversed together, and talked the poetry of love. Lord Francis almost forgot how the hours went, and could have remained there for ever, thinking of nought but Gertrude Ellerton, had not Lord Russell woke him from his trance, by taking him aside on the third morning, and saying, "I must force a subject on you, my young friend, which I have hitherto avoided, to give you time for thought. The circumstances, however, are these. Lord Howard of Escrick has been with me this morning, and has had a letter from your father——"

"I am sorry to hear it, my dear lord," replied the young nobleman; "I was not even aware that my father was acquainted with him; but Lord Howard is a villain, as I can prove, should need be."

"He is my cousin, Lord Francis," said Russell, calmly; "but yet, I will not altogether contradict you, though the term is, perhaps, too harsh. He is not a man I like. But to turn to the subject of his visit. Your father has written to him, it seems, though knowing little of him, in consequence of a message from Lord Howard, conveyed by your cousin Alcester, and relating to a subject for which I lately asked your attention. Your father, I find, refers him for an answer to a letter on the state of the country, written by the Earl to Lord Alcester; and though the epistle to Howard, which I have seen, is very brief, yet it contains expressions which both surprise and alarm me. He says, amongst other things, that whatever is done must be done quickly, and that he is ready at two days' notice to do all that he mentioned in his letter to Lord Alcester. This astonishes me, because I found him when I saw him five or six days ago, somewhat backward to admit the necessity of resisting arbitrary power at all. It alarms me, because Howard is not to be trusted in such matters. He is rash and intemperate, though I believe he means well. Of Lord Alcester, I know little or nothing: but his reputation for prudence and conduct does not stand high. The sudden change in your father's views impresses me with a belief, that he has heard of the efforts making in

behalf of Sir William Ellerton, and has some occasion to dread the result. I speak frankly, my young friend; for I fear that he may be hurried on by bad advice and worse information, not only to compromise himself, but to frustrate the plans of others for the security, I will not call it the deliverance, of their country. I say bad advice, for Lord Howard is, I know, so intimately linked with some of the most violent and dangerous men in the land, that, as far as possible, I avoid intercourse with him."

"But what would you have me do, my dear lord?" demanded the young nobleman; "I have no power or influence with my father."

"Nevertheless, I would have you ride down at once," said Lord Russell, "and tell him from me, that any attempt at resistance would be utterly vain at the present moment. We must remain tranquil, by all means, till the people are themselves convinced of the peril in which they place their civil and religious liberty, by flattering and fawning upon a despotic and papistical Court. We are totally unprepared to take any other steps to arrest the march of arbitrary power, than those of petitioning for the assembling of Parliament, and of protesting against the measures of the Court. We may make ourselves ready against the future; but any other measures than these at present would be mere madness, and would justly subject us to punishment. If you do not choose to speak to him in your own name, speak in mine; and as soon as I can find your cousin, Lord Alcester, who, I judge, is now in London, or about to visit the capital, I will endeavour to discover the nature of your father's communication to him, and do all in my power to prevent rash measures from being adopted by any one—though remember, that, with determination unalterable, I will pursue the path which my duty to my country requires, and which prudence sanctions."

"Of that I am quite sure," answered Lord Francis; "though I may differ from you, my dear lord, as to the means and the season; but tell me, is that matter very pressing, for I would fain remain another day to urge my own friends, whom I could not find yesterday, on the subject of Sir William Ellerton's just claims?"

"It is most pressing," said Lord Russell; "there are various sinister reports about the town of plots for assassinating the king. Most probably they are fictitious—a meal-sack affair—but, if perchance, the very wildest enthusiasts should have devised such a thing, and it should be brought home to them, depend upon it popular folly and court intrigue will contrive to confound those who have followed the

sanest and most justifiable course in maintenance of their country's freedom, with the criminals who have contemplated acts which would disgrace the holiest cause. I think, then, there is no time to lose. I would have you but take leave of Gertrude, and set out at once. As to Sir William Ellerton, I believe your stay could be of no advantage. Although I for one think Danby criminal, nevertheless, so long as he and the other lords are kept in the Tower, I see not what excuse can be made for dealing more leniently with Sir William."

The plan proposed by Lord Russell was followed; and in little more than an hour after this conversation, Francis de Vipont was on his way to Ellerton Castle, whither we may pursue his steps hereafter. ●

The day passed somewhat cheerlessly to Gertrude; but as the evening light was fading away in the sky, and she sat with Lord and Lady Russell, listening to a letter from a foreign court which the former was reading, one of the servants brought in a large packet, and placed it in his mistress's hands, saying, "A messenger from the Duke of Ormond, my lady, waits, not knowing if there be any answer."

Lady Russell opened the packet and took out a parchment, which she gazed at for a moment with a look of interest, then raising her head, she replied, "My most grateful thanks to the Duke; I will write to his Grace hereafter."

As soon as the servant had quitted the room, she threw her arms round Gertrude, and kissed her cheek. "I give you my joy, my dear child," she said; "this is your father's pardon, under the great seal."

"Let me see—let me see!" cried Lord Russell. "On my life! Rachel, you have done more than I conceived possible." And taking the parchment from her hands, he read it in silence, while Lady Russell gazed at it over his arm on one side, and Gertrude on the other.

"You shall take it to him yourself this very night," said Lord Russell, turning his eyes to Gertrude's face. "I must not go with you myself, I fear, for various reasons; but I will send our good old servant, Atkinson, to bear you company, and two stout porters to carry you thither in a chair. Bring him hither with you, Gertrude. The feeling of security is so sweet, that I am well convinced he will be glad to enjoy it even in a short journey from house to house."

Gertrude's heart overflowed, and though she could not answer, she took her noble friend's hand, and pressed her lips upon it; then cast herself into the arms of Lady Russell, and wept.

The chair was ordered at once, but before all was ready, night had fallen, and with a link before her, the fair girl set

out upon her way, carried swaying up and down amongst the numerous lights and innumerable passengers which then thronged the streets of London, at that curious jog-trot pace peculiar to the porters of the capital. On foot, or in a carriage, she would have known every step of the way; but now, hurried along, with curtains half drawn, and seeing nothing distinctly but figures which approached so close to the chair that they seemed about to run against her, she had no idea of the course the chairmen took, and only in her impatience thought it very long. Sometimes she was inclined to fancy they had made some mistake; but the figure of the old servant, Atkinson, to whom Lord Russell had given directions himself, and who walked close by her side, with his hand upon the large gilt handle of the door, re-assured her.

At length the chair was borne into darker and less-frequented streets, and nought was to be seen but a lamp here and there, and the red glare of the link upon the houses which they passed. Soon after, the chairmen stopped, and Atkinson, tapping at the glass, said, in a low voice, "My lord thought, madam, that perhaps you might like to walk on from this place, and told me to ask you."

"I see no need, Master Atkinson," said the young lady, "but as Lord Russell hinted it, I will follow the suggestion." The door was immediately opened, and stepping out, Gertrude looked around. "You must be wrong," she said, "I do not know where I am!"

"This is Milk-street, madam," replied the servant; "my lord told me to come up Milk-street, and stop to ask you if you pleased to walk, at the first corner."

"Wood-street, you mean, Atkinson," said the lady.

"So it was!" exclaimed the servant, in a tone of surprise and reminiscence. "I beg you a thousand pardons, madam; but Wood-street is close by. Had you not better get into the chair again?"

"It is no matter," said Gertrude, "I will walk—it cannot be far." Thus saying, she went on, with the servant keeping close to her side to direct her, and the link-boy marching on before, till the well-known front of Shepherd's house appeared, and Gertrude was approaching the private entrance, when two men suddenly came forth from the great door of the store, and advanced with a hurried step towards her. One was a complete stranger to her, but on the face of the other the light of the link flashed as he approached, and she beheld Lord Alcester.

"I shall away to the country as quick as possible," said the young nobleman, "and if you would follow my advice, you could do so too, Escrick."

"Hush, hush!" answered the other, "you are frightened without cause."

At that moment Lord Alcester's eyes turned upon Gertrude, and he stopped suddenly, exclaiming, "Ha, my fair tenant of the cottage! you here, in London town?" and he would have taken her hand, but Gertrude drew back indignantly, saying, "Let me pass, Lord Alcester. Thank God! I am not without protection now."

"Stand out of the way, sir," said Atkinson. "Are you drunk, to insult a lady thus in the open street?" and he pushed Lord Alcester aside, thrusting him against Lord Howard of Escrick.

"Hallo, knave!" cried the latter, "I have seen your face somewhere before, but nevertheless I will break your pate for you," and he struck the man a blow with a cane he carried in his hand. At the same moment Lord Alcester caught Gertrude's arm, and was saying, "Hear me a little, fair maid, I wish to ask you some questions"—when suddenly a tall figure interposed between him and Lord Howard, and catching each by the collar at once, threw them violently to the right and left, till they reeled against the houses. "Back to your kennels, hounds!" cried a voice Gertrude was right glad to hear. "Put up your dishonoured sword, Howard of Escrick," continued the juggler, "or I will call the watch, and consign you to the place fit for such as you; and put up yours, too, licentious boy—your punishment is coming quicker than you think. Go home and meditate on what you have done. Tell your confederate uncle, to look to his safety, for his treason and yours are known. What! still snarling, cur? Up with your sword, I say. Have I not spoken plain enough?—Ha! here comes the watch."

Lord Alcester instantly thrust his weapon back into the scabbard, and hurried away. Lord Howard had been nimbler with his limbs, and was already gone; but neither was much too soon in departing, for the next moment three or four men of the city guard came up to Gertrude and her companions, looking sharply at them for an instant, and then demanding, "What is there toward here? We heard high words."

"I saw swords gleam," said another man.

"'T was but two ruffling gallants were inclined to insult this lady," answered the juggler, "when I, knowing her, came up, and they drew upon me."

"One of them struck me on the head," said the old servant, "but if my lord hears of it, he will punish him, I warrant, as well as for stopping this young lady, his ward."

"And who is your lord, friend?" asked the chief of the watch. "You may as well tell us who the lady is, too."

"My master is the good Lord Russell," replied Atkinson, with pride in his tone, "and this lady, as I told you, is his ward."

"What! insult the Lord Russell's people in the streets of London!" cried the watchman. "Which way did they take? After them, good fellows, we may catch them yet. They went down Lawrence Lane, I think."

"Ay, ay," answered Atkinson, "I thought that the good men of London would not suffer a Russell to have indignity done to his people.—Here is the door, madam."

"Listen to me, Gertrude, for a moment," said the juggler, drawing her aside, and speaking in a low tone. "You are seeking your father, are you not?"

"Yes, my noble friend," replied Gertrude, with a glad smile taking place of the anxious look which her alarm had left. "I have his pardon here—a full, free pardon."

"That is glad news, indeed!" said the juggler, "and it is Ormond's doing. I can now tell you, without exciting alarm, what I have to tell. It is vain seeking your father there. I have just been to inquire for him, and he is not there."

"Not there!" cried Gertrude, in terror and surprise! but the next instant she added, in a more hopeful tone, "you did not ask for him by the right name. He has been called Master Fenwick since he came hither."

"He is not there, dear Gertrude," replied the other. "I did ask for him by the name of Fenwick, but the house is vacant of all but a woman servant, and she assures me he is gone—how or where, she could not or would not tell."

"She will tell me," answered Gertrude, "and perhaps he may be there still. I do not think the girl knows the room he inhabited, for it was always Shepherd himself who lighted us thither. At all events, let us inquire further. Is not Master Shepherd at home himself? He usually is at this hour."

"He is not so now, and will not be for long," replied the juggler, with meaning emphasis; and bending his head, he added, in a whisper, "Shepherd is in Newgate, on a charge of treason. I wish you, dear Gertrude, to return as speedily as possible to Southampton Place, and give Lord Russell, privately, the news I now give you. I think it may be important to him, though I am not sure. You may tell him I sent you, and mention my name, if you please."

"In Newgate on a charge of treason!" repeated the lady, thoughtfully, as the scene she had beheld through the half-open doors of the warehouse on her first visit to her father flashed to her mind. "I will go directly—only let me

ascertain whether my father be really gone or not, and whether he have left any message or letter for me. You will come with me, will you not?"

"Readily," replied the juggler, and advancing to the door, he rang the bell.

"Ah, lady, is that you?" said the woman-servant, who came to the step at the summons. "You don't know all the sad things that have happened. They have taken my poor master away to Newgate, and say he is guilty of high treason, God wot! though he, poor, honest man, never was guilty of any worse fault than selling Canary for Xeres, in all his days, I'll answer for him."

"But what is become of his lodgers?" asked Gertrude, anxiously, "they did not take them also."

"Not that I am aware of, madam," said the girl. "You see, I do not know much of what happened, for I was so frightened that when Jeremiah, the prentice, brought me the news that there were council messengers and constables in the house, I ran and hid myself in the coal-house."

"And where are the young men?" asked Gertrude. "Can they not tell us more?"

"No, they are all gone home," replied the servant, "but Jeremiah told me all about it; how they apprehended my master, and then searched the house from top to bottom, and took away all the papers they could find, and drank a pitcher of the best wine."

"And are you quite sure that Master Fenwick is gone?" demanded the lady; "he may still be concealed in his room, which is difficult to find."

"No, no," said the girl, "I have been in that room twice since the messengers went; and there he is not."

"Did he leave no paper, there?" inquired the juggler, who stood by Gertrude's side.

"If he did, the men took it away," said the servant, "for they did not leave a scrap that was written upon so big as the rind of an onion; but I do not think they took the gentlemen, too, for they neither apprehended the prentices; nor the serving men and coopers, and I think some of the lads would have told me if such a thing had happened."

"This is enough, Gertrude," said the juggler. "Give the woman the notice of the errand that brought you hither; for that can but do good; and then hasten back to convey the intelligence of what has occurred here to Southampton Place. I fear the tidings thereof may be of but little less importance than those which you carried thence."

"Should Master Fenwick or his friend return," said Gertrude, turning to the woman at this suggestion, "inform him

I have been here, and brought with me a full pardon for Sir William Ellerton. He will know who I mean."

"I shall not stay here alone all night, indeed," answered the girl, with a sullen air. "I should be frightened to death in this large rambling place. So I shall go home to my aunt's, and come back at daylight to-morrow."

The juggler mused for a moment. It was evident the girl sought to be bribed to stay, and he calculated the chances rapidly of Sir William Ellerton's return. "Come, Gertrude," he said at length, "I will walk with you," and as she turned an inquiring glance to his face, he added, in a low tone, "He will not return, Gertrude—at least, not to-night. There is no likelihood of it. Have you walked all this way, dear girl?"

"Oh, no," replied the lady; "the chair is close at hand. But this is very sad, when I had joyous news for my poor father, to find that he is gone, and left no trace by which I can discover him."

"He has gone in haste, Gertrude," said the juggler; "probably on tidings of an approaching visit of the messengers to Shepherd's house, and perhaps from some misapprehension of their object. But I will discover him soon. I have seen his trusty companion, and from him it was that I learned his abode. He also knows where to find me; so that we shall not be long without news. Your tidings are indeed joyful ones, but more remains to be done. You must have the estates back again, sweet Gertrude."

"Oh, that is beyond hope;" replied the lady, with a heavy sigh.

"Nay, nay, not so," said her companion; "but we shall see. Is this your chair?"

He placed her in the vehicle, which they now approached; and then leaning in, before the door was closed, he repeated the injunction he had given before, but still more earnestly, "Tell Lord Russell this very night of Shepherd's arrest," he said, in a whisper; "I have my fears, Gertrude—I have my fears."

"And I also," replied the lady. "I will not fail;" and the door being shut, she was borne away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LORD FRANCIS DE VIFONT galloped along the road; for the black care which so frequently sits behind the horseman is as good as whip and spur. The news he had heard from Lord Russell had alarmed him much, for though a cautious man, yet his father he knew to be a very vehement and eager poli-

tician. Differing altogether from Lord Russell, it was as a party man, rather than as a patriot, that his enthusiasms were aroused; and differing, though not in the same degree, from Lord Shaftesbury, he had none of that versatility of character which has received a black immortality from the scorching pen of Dryden. Self-interest led him, it is true, as it did Achitophel, but with him it led always in the same direction. The few words of Lord Russell had pointed out to the son the secret workings of the father's heart, and had shown how the eager grasping spirit might march in the same course with political fanaticism. Lord Francis saw not, indeed, how the return of Sir William Ellerton could affect his father's property, at least in a direct manner, for the reversal of the outlawry could not invalidate the grant from the crown. It is true that the presence of Gertrude's father in England might be a continual reproach to the man who had obtained possession of his estates; but still Lord Francis knew very well that his father would not think himself called upon to surrender them to their previous owner; for, although he had privately professed at first, to receive them merely as a sort of trustee for his cousin, yet since the meeting and the duel which was known to have taken place between Sir William and himself, he had never held the same language, but had spoke of the Ellerton property as absolutely and permanently his own. Nevertheless, it was not difficult to understand that a greedy and avaricious man would long to strengthen himself in possession of that which he had wrongly obtained; and it was clear that the court party then in power were likely to look with the highest degree of favour upon the claims of one who, like Sir William Ellerton, had suffered long and severely for the same political principles which they professed. That they were all-powerful for the time, was evident; that the considerations of equity, justice, or law, would prove no impediment to anything they chose to do, had been proved a dozen times within the last few months; and that the constitution of the country, and the rights, liberties, and even lives of their opponents would be perilled by the continuance of their power, could not be doubted. Such were the grounds upon which the young nobleman conceived his father to have acted, although he could hardly imagine that he had proceeded to such rash steps as Lord Russell's intelligence implied, without some more powerful motive than was apparent.

Meditations upon these subjects occupied his thoughts during the greater part of his morning's journey: and the eagerness which intense thought almost always generates in a young mind, hurried him more rapidly forward than was beneficial to his horse's wind and strength. The poor animal which bore

him seemed a good deal distressed when he halted for an hour about forty miles from London, and the horses of his servants were well nigh knocked up. More than thirty miles still remained to be accomplished; and when the young nobleman again mounted, the groom ventured to say, "I think you had better go a little slower, my lord, or the beasts won't hold out."

"I will go slower, Martin," replied his master; "but I intend to get fresh horses for myself and two of you ten miles on, at Ford. The others can come after. I wish to get in before dark."

"You will not do it, my lord," said the man; "it is six o'clock now, and Harrington's horses are not very good."

"We must try," said Lord Francis, and rode on. About half-past seven, going at a slower pace, he reached the small country town called Ford, and riding up to the door of the only inn where he was known, he inquired eagerly for horses.

"There is not one in the stable, my lord," replied the landlord, who had come out. "A council messenger and his two followers took them all away an hour and a half ago. They seemed in great haste to catch some one; but I could not make out who it was."

The news was not pleasant to Francis de Vipont; and, after musing for a moment, he dismounted, and examined all the horses attentively. His own seemed still the freshest of the four, and turning to the landlord, he said, "Bring out a large bowl of strong beer, and give it to him. I must get on to-night, at all events."

The landlord shook his head doubtfully, but the beer was soon produced, and the bit being taken out of the horse's mouth, he thrust in his muzzle, and drank it to the dregs.

"Now, Martin," said his master, "I shall go on alone. You follow with the rest as early as possible to-morrow." Thus saying, he mounted again, and proceeded at a slow trot along the road till he reached a cross, which marked out the separation of the road into three branches; and choosing a path which was not only shorter than the highway, but also easier for the horse's feet, as it led over the hills where turf was abundant, he directed his course towards Ellerton, by Morrington and Malwood. In about half an hour the sun sank below the horizon, but the young nobleman knew the country well, and the evening was clear and fine. "I can get a fresh horse at Morrington," he thought—but Morrington was still eight miles distant—when, putting his foot upon a rolling stone as he went down hill, the horse fell with tremendous force, bringing his rider to the ground along with him. Starting up with very little injury, Lord Francis got

the beast upon its feet again, and instantly turned to examine its knees. By the faint light, it was impossible to ascertain to what extent the injury was carried; but it was clear that both knees were broken, and when the young nobleman led the poor beast for a few steps by the bridle, it went so lame with the near leg that it was vain to think of mounting again.

Walking slowly on with the rein over his arm, he had gone about two miles further towards Morrington, when he perceived, coming towards him, just over the defined edge of one of the hills, a party of three men on horseback, spread out in a line over the turf. He paid but little attention to them, however, till they were close beside him, when the man nearest to him suddenly sprang to the ground, and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying, "I arrest you in the king's name; mount, and come along with me."

"There will be no use in my mounting," replied Lord Francis, in a calm tone; "for my horse's knees are broken, and he cannot carry me; but I think, my good sir, there must be some error. As I never did anything in my life to incur the king's displeasure, I imagine you mistake me for some one else."

"Pooh! pooh! that is the old story," said the messenger, while the other two horsemen came up and joined them; "if we were to take a prisoner's word for his identity, he would be always some one else. Take a look at him, Gipson, and tell us what you think."

"That will do," answered the man to whom he spoke, with a significant nod of the head; "just the height, and all that, and the smart dress too."

"I am sure you are mistaken," rejoined Lord Francis, "but the responsibility rests with you; and I tell you it is a great one, for I am on business of importance."

"It must wait, then," said the messenger, dryly; "for you must come along with us. The people at Morrington told us where we should find you; and Bill, the ostler, shall have a crown for his pains, the next time I pass that way."

"They must be very clever people," replied Lord Francis, "to tell you where you would find me, when they could not know themselves. Let me inform you, my good friend, that I only left London this morning."

"We know that as well as you do," said the messenger; "and we have hunted you all along the road to Morrington, and then back here—but there is no use of talking any more in this manner. John Holloway, obey the king's warrant, and walk on along the road before me."

"I will obey it," answered Lord Francis, calmly, "although

my name is not John Holloway, but Lord Francis de Vipont. Now you know who I am: make me go on at your peril."

The messenger burst into a laugh: "That is a good joke," he said. "If you were Lord Francis de Vipont, would you be here all alone with a broken-kneed horse? Go on, sir, go on;" and, turning to one of his followers, he added, "I shall leave you at the next village, Gipson; for I must have your horse to mount our man. The Council meets at twelve, and he must be in before that."

Notwithstanding every remonstrance on the part of the young nobleman, the proposal was followed. For nearly four miles, indeed, he was forced to walk on foot, leading his own horse; but at length a small village was reached, possessing the convenience of a little ale-house, where Gipson very readily surrendered his beast to the prisoner; and the rest of the party rode on towards London, passing through Ford about half-past eleven o'clock. At that place Lord Francis made an ineffectual attempt to induce his captors to stop; but the messenger would not listen to him; and anxious to accomplish the double object of reaching London before twelve on the following day, and of obtaining a good night's rest, in the first instance, he pushed on till he reached a small town about thirty miles from the capital, where he knocked up the people of the inn, and, announcing his high and important office, domineered and exacted in the true spirit of the trade.

No person presented himself amongst the sleepy attendants of the inn whose face was familiar to Lord Francis de Vipont; and although he was annoyed and indignant at the self-sufficient obstinacy of the messenger, he was forced to submit to his fate, and endure the presence of one of the men in his room throughout the night. Had he been so inclined, it was quite possible for him to make his escape; for the man in charge of him, fatigued with hard riding, and stupified with a large tankard of ale before he went to bed, slept like a stone; so that it would have been no difficult matter to abstract the key of the door from under his pillow. But the young nobleman, certain that his durance could not last long, resolved to run no risk, and remained patiently till his captors thought fit to arouse themselves on the following morning. It was somewhat later than they could have wished, indeed, when they did rise; but still the messenger would not depart without his breakfast; and, placing the prisoner between himself and his companion, he had just taken his seat at a very well-spread board, in the public room, when a gentleman entered, and, as he sauntered towards the window, cast a glance at the group on the other side of the table, which instantly called a

look of recognition into his fine but somewhat worn and wrinkled countenance.

"Ah, Lord Francis de Vipont!" he said, "how does your lordship do?"

"Very badly, Sir Algernon," replied the young nobleman, while the florid face of the messenger turned somewhat white; "these two worthies met me last night returning to Ellerton Castle, and choosing to insist upon it that my name is John Holloway, arrested and brought me back hither, in spite of every remonstrance. If they would have stopped at Ford, as I desired, there are three of my own servants there."

"The knaves ought to have their ears cropped," replied Algernon Sydney. "Are you not bound, sir," he continued, turning to the messenger, "to take every means offered for ascertaining that you are not committing a greater breach of the rights of Englishmen than bad laws justify? Is it thus that the poison of arbitrary government spreads through all the veins and arteries of the State, down to the smallest and lowest of its channels? This is Lord Francis de Vipont, as I can bear witness; and I trust he will punish you severely for your unjustifiable conduct."

"He cannot do that easily," answered the man, sullenly; "let him try, if he likes. I did not know him, and could but go by description. Besides, the people of the inn at Mornington told me that I should find Holloway just where I found him."

"They knew you to be a fool," said Sydney, "and put you off the scent, I dare say. Do you know me? Do you take my word as to who this is?"

"Yes, I know you well enough," replied the other; and then muttered something that was inaudible, but which, by the look that accompanied it, did not seem to be a benediction.

"Sir, I shall remember you," said Lord Francis, rising; "I suppose you are not inclined to pursue your folly further."

The man gave him a swaggering look, and hesitated for a moment, as if half disposed to bully the matter out; but a little reflection showed him that it might be dangerous; and with a somewhat indistinct apology he swallowed a few mouthfuls, and laying down the sword of which he had deprived his prisoner, he quitted the room with his follower.

"Who did he take you for, my lord?" demanded Sydney, with a keen and somewhat anxious look, as soon as the two men were gone.

"A person of the name of John Holloway," replied the young nobleman. "I gathered from their discourse that he is a merchant of Bristol; but they said the charge against

him is high treason—an unusual one in the case of a merchant."

"It is a coat made to fit all sizes," answered Sydney, setting his teeth hard; "but I must bid you good-bye, my lord. I must away to London upon business needing speed. I wish you a more prosperous journey for to-day than you made yesterday."

"Pray tell Lord Russell, if you see him, what has happened," said Lord Francis.

"I will, do not doubt it," replied Sydney with peculiar emphasis; and hurrying from the room, he was in the saddle ere five minutes more had passed, and riding away towards the capital.

All that he saw, all that he heard, made the young nobleman whom he left behind but the more anxious to see his father as soon as possible; and obtaining a horse at the inn, though not without difficulty, he set out, accompanied by what we should now call a postilion, to bring the animal back again at the end of the journey. No impediment now occurred, and after riding the hack he had hired for thirty miles, the young lord obtained another which bore him to the gates of Ellerton Castle, just as the sun was setting. His first inquiry was for his father; but the major-domo to whom it was addressed, replied that the Earl had gone over in haste to Malwood, and Lord Francis hesitated whether to mount again and follow him, or wait his return. A further question, however, elicited the fact, that the Earl had been gone six hours, and was expected to return directly; and mounting the stairs, he directed his steps to the usual sitting-room of his sister.

Emmeline met him with a look of gladness; but yet Francis remarked at once that her face was pale, and that there was a look of anxiety upon it, not usual in that firm and tranquil countenance.

"No, I am not ill, Francis," she replied, in answer to his inquiries; "nor has anything that I know of occurred to disturb me; but it is that I have an unaccountable impression that something has happened, or is happening, that I do not know, which makes me feel more apprehensive than usual. A messenger arrived from Alcester this morning in great haste; and my father set out at once for Malwood. On so slight a basis is my anxiety raised. Do not think me very foolish, Francis, and remember I am but a woman."

"There are instincts, my dear sister," answered Lord Francis, "which sometimes lead us more directly to the truth than reason. I am apprehensive too, Emmeline, but not of anything connected with your fate."

"Nor I, nor I, Francis," answered the lady; "my thoughts did not tend that way. Several notes passed between my father and Lord Alcester the day before yesterday; then I heard that the latter was gone to London. This morning came another letter from him, and then my father went away, as I have told you, in haste, though he has not ridden so far for years. Then the conversation which took place some days ago at supper, between the Earl, and Lord Russell, and Colonel Sydney, gave a direction to my fears which I trust in Heaven may not be just."

Her brother was silent for a few moments, and then suddenly turned the conversation. "Let us hope the best, dear Emmeline," he said; "in some respects I have joyful news for you; for that which is joyful to me will be so to you also, I know. Gertrude is in England, under the kind protection of Lady Russell; and three happy days have I passed with her in Southampton Place."

"How sweet it must be," said Emmeline, casting down her eyes thoughtfully, "to meet again, after so long an absence, the person we so dearly love," and she fell into deep meditation.

"Let us go down to the hall, Emmeline," said her brother, after having given her some time to indulge the griefs which her words showed him were renewed in her bosom. "It is growing very dark, and I trust my father will return soon. Besides, I have a tale to tell of strange adventures on the road. I should have been here last night, but I was stopped by what I will relate when we have light to see each other's faces. Come, Emmeline."

Lord Francis, however, was not allowed to begin his story, for hardly were they in the large hall below and lights before them, when the major-domo returned to say that there was a famous juggler without, with several black slaves, claiming to show his skill to the lords and ladies there. "He is a very grand man," the servant added, "and speaks more like a prince than a wandering conjurer."

"Were Lord Rochester alive, we might think it was he in disguise," said Francis de Vipont; "for it was one of his common tricks to roam about the country and show feats upon a stage as an Italian mountebank. What say you, Emmeline, to the juggler's application?"

"Oh, send him away, of course," replied the lady, "give him a piece of money, and bid him go."

"Nay, I have a great inclination to see his performance," said her brother; "it is long since I saw a skillful juggler. I should like to witness it much."

Emmeline turned and gazed at him in surprise, hardly be-

lieving her ears; but the face of Lord Francis was calm and serious, and she murmured "Well, if you like it, I care not."

"Bring him in," said her brother, speaking to the servant, and the man retired to fulfil his orders. A few moments after, several of the Earl's servants appeared, carrying a large table, two small chests, and a sort of screen of some transparent cloth, stretched over a wooden frame, and on either side of them marched two Moors, in their wild costume, with their naked scimitars in their hands.

"This is indeed a magnificent and awful train," said Emmeline; "but I know not what my father will say, if he returns and finds the hall thus tenanted."

"Never mind, dear sister," replied Lord Francis, "we could have worse amusement than that which this man will give us, I am inclined to think. Come hither to the dais, Emmeline, we can watch him best there;" and drawing her arm through his, he led her to the far part of the hall, across which ran a raised seat, somewhat in the fashion of a sofa without arms.

The moment after, the juggler, whom we have so often seen, entered by the same door which had given admission to the servants and his Moors; but he was now dressed in a different costume from that in which we have hitherto seen him. A long, loose Turkish robe, of rich brocade, covered his tall form, and on his head he wore an immense turban, one fringed end of the golden gauze which covered it hanging down to his right shoulder, and shading part of the face. By his side hung a scimitar, and in his girdle was a long taper knife, with a richly-incrusted silver hilt. As on a former occasion, he advanced to the table on which stood the lights, gazing round in profound silence, while his slaves opened one of the cases, and seemed to make some preparations behind the screen. He saluted no one, he appeared to fix his eyes upon no one; but leaned his hand upon the table; and Francis de Vipont saw it tremble.

"Now," he said at length, "shall I show you the mirror of nature, the book of thought, or the past, the present, and the future?"

Emmeline's hand clasped tighter upon her brother's arm; but she remained as silent as the dead; and he answered, "Oh, the past, the present, and the future, by all means. He who can tell us that, may well deserve our thanks."

The juggler waved his hand towards the screen, which became immediately brightly illuminated by a strong light from behind; and at the same moment one of the Moors extinguished the lights upon the table. "Come!" said a fine

mellow voice. "Come, quick!" and instantly the bright square spot, which appeared in the centre of the hall like a picture, began to change. Confused shapes, like waves, rolled along the lower part; on the right and left, capes and promontories began to stretch forth from the sides, clouds swept over above, the billows became distinct, rushing and foaming in the foreground, and fading away less and less as they receded from the eye. A gallant ship appeared with crowded sails, and the English flag, floating free, passed tossing across the picture, and disappeared again. Then came a lesser vessel toiling amidst the waves, with her topsails reefed, and her mainsail torn. Suddenly a bright stream of lightning crossed the sky, and the mast fell shivering over the side.

Emmeline trembled violently. "See the end: see the end, and fear not," said her brother; "courage, sweet sister, courage!"

Another moment, and with a terrific roll the vessel fell over on her side, and then a number of human figures were seen struggling in the water. One more distinct than all the rest clung to a drifting spar, and seemed floating nearer and nearer to headland in the front. Suddenly a boat shot forth from the little bay beneath the point, came close to the man on the spar, and the boatmen appeared to lean over towards him in the water. They caught him by the arms, and dragged him in, and at the same moment the unfortunate ship sank down at once into the waves.

The Lady Emmeline rested upon her brother's shoulder, he felt her press more heavily upon him, and her hand fell upon his neck.

"Help here! she has fainted."

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHAT is all this?" cried the stern voice of the Earl of Virepout, entering the hall, while servants were running for water and essences, and the Lady Emmeline lay like death upon her brother's arm. At her side knelt the juggler, chafing her fair hand in his, and gazing in her face with anxious eyes, while two or three attendants stood round with lights, and the Moors remained gathered together at the further end of the hall, with their naked scimitars in their hands.

The door at which the Earl entered was half-way down the long chamber, and certainly the sights that his eyes met with, whichever way he turned them, might well call forth the exclamation of "What is all this?"

He was followed close by the young Lord Alcester, who, after casting a hurried glance around, replied to the question with a loud scoff, saying, "It is, my lord, that you have got a ruffianly impostor in your house, who has probably frightened the Lady Emmeline into a swoon. There he stands—that is the man who, as I told you, broke down my park-fences, and suffered all my deer to escape."

"Carry her away, Francis," said the juggler, in a low tone, to Emmeline's brother; and then turning to the party of new comers, he strode on towards Lord Alcester. "What was that you said, young man?" he demanded, while, to Lord Alcester's surprise, the Earl drew back with a look of surprise not unmingled with awe, "that I have broken down your fences, and suffered your deer to escape? It is false, idle boy. It is false, I say!"

"False!" cried the young lord, laying his hand upon his sword.

"False, as you are yourself," answered the juggler; "you have no fences, you have no parks, you have no deer! Who are you but the impostor and the ruffian that you call others—a beggar, who for months has fed from my purse!"

The young lord's sword sprang from the sheath; but the Earl put his hand upon his arm, crying, "Hold! hold! It is true what he says."

"True!" exclaimed Lord Alcester. "My lord, are you mad? or would you insult me, too? Who is he?"

"Who am I?" cried the juggler; "I am Henry Maldon, Lord Alcester, your father's elder brother's son."

"It is false!" cried the other; "or, if true, you are an outlaw and a traitor, incapable of inheriting either name or lands."

The juggler laughed aloud. "I have seen a snake," he said, "when caught beneath the fork of a husbandman, wriggle, and writhe, and bite at the cold iron. So will you, young man. No outlawry ever passed against me, for men do not outlaw those they believe to be dead. A full and complete pardon for every imaginary offence passed the great seal not a week ago, and lest at any time there should be doubts of the legality of pardoning unproved offences, a *nolle prosequi* was entered by the Attorney-General, as to the proceedings commenced against me. Give up, then, at once the title you have not honoured, the wealth you have misused, and prepare to pay the sums you have unjustly received and foolishly squandered; for, be sure, I will exact the uttermost farthing. My tenants have already notice that their lord has returned to claim his own, and not one penny more will you

be able to extract from those whom your vices have disgusted, and your greed injured."

The point of the young man's sword—I must no longer call him Lord Alcester—sank slowly, till it touched the pavement of the hall. A livid paleness overspread his face, and his eyes sought the floor with a look of haggard despair. His arrogant dream of wealth, and power, and rank, were at an end, and that at a moment when it all seemed most like reality. Not a doubt had ever arisen that Henry Maldon had perished, like all the rest, in the ship which was bearing him to the ports of France; not a suspicion that he was still alive had ever crossed his cousin's mind. Yet the instant recognition of the Earl showed that the claim could not be resisted; and now Charles Maldon asked himself what was to become of him? whither was he to turn? what was he to do? He was without hope and without resource. His own patrimonial property had been squandered years before. The claim which his cousin declared he would put in for the repayment of all that had been received, would be ruin and destruction. In the space of a few months, he had anticipated and spent more than the income of a year and a half; and now he asked himself, how was he ever to meet the large debts thus contracted, and the still larger claims which his cousin had upon him. His mind seemed to refuse to reason upon such a theme, or to separate and arrange all the painful points of his situation. They remained, however, darkly and confusedly visible, offering nothing but despair and ruin.

The Earl of Virepont saw his distress, but gave him no comfort; for he himself had much matter for anxious thought, in the return of the promised husband of his daughter, and in his own existing circumstances. Under the belief that Charles Maldon was beyond all doubt Lord Alcester, he had gone too far with him in developing the schemes which he entertained, to draw back with safety; and anxious to bind him to himself by the strongest ties, he had, that very night, pressed upon him the necessity of a union between the two families, and treated the objections and refusal of his daughter in a tone of contempt. How was he now to act? Which way was he to turn? The sudden appearance of her promised husband, in circumstances which at once restored him to all his rights, would, he well knew, render Emmeline's resolution inflexible; and yet there were points which made him dread to give any offence to Charles Maldon, and showed him perils in exciting his anger, which the young man himself did not see. In truth, he doubted the story of the letter he had written some days before having been accidentally lost; he suspected that his young relation had kept it as a

hold upon him, and between the two cousins, in the strange and painful scenes which were taking place, he knew not what to say or how to act.

He was still standing in gloomy silence, a step behind Charles Maldon, when the juggler turned to him. "My Lord of Virepont," he said, "my very noble cousin, I am glad to see that your memory is not so short as some men's, and that you have recollected me at once, even in this strange attire which, for reasons of my own, I have assumed. I have not time, just now, to enter upon the many subjects which have to be talked of between us. That shall be for a future day; but at present, my good lord, I will show you my affection by a piece of friendly advice—step aside with me for a moment, as it is for your private ear;" and taking his arm, he led him at some distance from the rest, and then proceeded, saying, "Absent here in the country, you do not as well know what is occurring in the capital, as well as the people of the capital know what is occurring here. I have to tell you that you are in a dangerous situation; that three men whom you may have heard of, Keeling, a petty merchant, West, an infidel lawyer, and Colonel Rumsey, the right-hand man of your friend, Lord Shaftesbury, are in the hands of the Government."

The face of the Earl showed no emotion at the mention of the two first names; but when Colonel Rumsey was spoken of, his cheek assumed a paler hue; and though he did not turn his head, his eyes glanced anxiously round, and his thick eyebrows gathered heavily over them. "Moreover," continued the juggler, "Hone, Rouse, and Walcot have been apprehended; and still more important, Shepherd, where your lordship often tasted wine last winter, in company with the Earl of Shaftesbury, has been arrested, and, they say, made full confession."

The Earl had by this time recovered himself. "Well, my good cousin," he said, in an indifferent tone, "what have I to do with all this? Most of these men's names I have never heard; with the others I may have spoken half a dozen words."

"These may have been important," said the juggler; "but that which will give point to all, is a matter for your own consideration. I ask no questions; but you had better inquire yourself, whether, as is believed, you have written letters of a treasonable kind; whether these letters have not fallen into the hands of others than those for whom you intended them, and whether it may not be better for you to take every means to secure yourself against evil results. I speak of your dear daughter's promised husband; and if you

seek further information, you shall have it as soon as I obtain it; for I must this very night wend my way back to London, though I reached Illington only at a late hour this morning —ah, here comes your son again. Now, Francis, how goes it with dear Emmeline?"

"She is better, Henry," replied Lord Francis, grasping the hand which the juggler held out to him; "but it were well, I think, for you not to see her again to-night. Her thoughts are all confused. She knows you are living and well; but whether she has really seen you and heard your voice, she cannot tell. It seems to her all a dream. Let me tranquillise her mind, explain to her all the circumstances, and repeat to her what you told me some few nights ago, regarding the two letters which you sent from Spain, but which failed to reach her. Then, when she is somewhat calmer, you can see her to-morrow."

"You take somewhat too much upon yourself, my son," said the Earl; "her father's voice must be heard in these matters, and there are many things to be considered. My Lord of Alcester, as I must call you now, I give you thanks for the intimation you have afforded, though this matter affects me little. As to other points, I must have some time for thought, and you shall hear from me in London, as you say you are going thither directly."

"Directly!" exclaimed Lord Francis, in some surprise.

"Yes, Francis," replied the other; "I must go this very night; but I will soon return. I know not what matters remain to be considered by your noble father; but we will not discuss them now. Tell Emmeline, that during the long years of absence, I have loved her ever only with increasing love; for as plants grow in the night as well as in the day, so my affection for her has increased under the darkest as well as under the brightest hours. Tell her I will be back soon to claim her as my own; and methinks no man will venture to gainsay me. Adieu, my good lord; and you," he continued, turning to his cousin, who was taking a step forward as if to speak, "remember what I have said; for you will find I keep my word, for evil or for good. I give you three days to quit my house, and at the end of that time I come to possess it. In regard to the sums you have squandered, you will hear from my man of law."

"I must speak with you, sir," said his cousin.

"There is no need of speech," answered the juggler, "all is determined, no conversation is required."

"By faith! but it is though," rejoined the young man; "you may find this affair not so easily settled as you imagine."

"We will see," answered the juggler; "and let me tell you, my good cousin, that your only choice, perchance, may be between the debtors' prison and the Tower. Farewell, Francis, for the present. Adieu my lord; your son knows where to find me," and grasping the hand of Lord Francis, he turned away, and walked down the hall. "There, take away that trash," he continued, when he had reached the lower end, pointing to the implements of his juggler's trade; "I have done with that for ever, unless it be to amuse my grand-children some day. But it has served me well, and proved to me what fools men can be, even better than I knew the fact before."

The group which remained at the upper part of the hall were silent for a moment or two after he had left it, and gazed at each other with very different feelings. The Earl strove strongly to master the agitation which he felt, and to maintain his usual cold and resolute demeanor, but the effort was too apparent; Charles Maldon looked bewildered and overwhelmed, and stood gnawing his lip, while his eyes turned with a restless and uncertain look alternately to his cousin and to the Earl. Lord Francis de Vipont, with his arms crossed upon his chest, gazed with a thoughtful look at his father, asking himself whether he could venture to deliver the message from Lord Russell in the presence of his cousin or not.

It was the Earl who spoke first. "So, Lord Francis," he said, in a cold tone, "you have been a party to all this strange masquerade?"

"No party, my lord," replied his son, "though cognizant for some days of Alcester's presence in the neighbourhood, and of his disguise: but let us not, my dear father, at least at present, dwell upon any matters of offence. I have come down from London in haste, to bear you a message of deep importance, and should have been here last night, but that I was arrested just beyond Morrington by a council messenger, and carried back towards London."

"Arrested by a council messenger!" exclaimed his father. "In Heaven's name! upon what charge?"

"It was a mistake," replied Lord Francis; "the messenger had been to Morrington, and had been there misled, purposely, I suspect. The people told him that the person he was in search of—a man named Holloway—would be found amongst the hills. He and his followers found me looking at my horse's knees which were just broken by a fall, and arrested me in despite of all I could say. Luckily, on the following morning, I was seen by Algernon Sydney, who instantly recognised me, and I came on hither."

"Holloway!" said his father; "is that the Bristol merchant of the name?"

"Something was said about Bristol," replied his son; "but what I have to tell is of immediate consequence, and craves attention."

"Well, speak," said his father, "what is it?"

"It is a message from Lord Russell," answered the young nobleman; "and I think it must be delivered to your car alone."

He looked towards his cousin as he spoke, but the unfortunate man did not remark his words or manner. His eyes were fixed upon the ground, and his thoughts seemed so completely chained down to one subject, that he gave no attention to aught else.

"Come hither, then," said the Earl, leading the way to a deep-seated window; "no one will hear you here. Now, what is Lord Russell's message?"

"He yesterday morning informed me, my lord," replied his son, "that he had seen a letter from you, to that infamous person, Lord Howard of Esrick, who, he distinctly says, is not to be trusted in the matters referred to, as he is intimately linked with some of the most violent and dangerous men in the land."

"To the point, to the point," cried the Earl, impatiently; "Lord Howard's character I have nought to do with. I answered a letter from him as a matter of courtesy; I did not say aught—no, surely, I could not say aught that could be perverted into a wrong sense."

"You said something, my father, that both surprised and alarmed Lord Russell," replied Lord Francis; "I use his own words. He said he feared you might be hurried by bad advice and worse information to compromise yourself, and he bade me tell you, that any attempt at resistance would be vain at the present moment: that it was necessary to remain tranquil in all things, till the eyes of the people are opened; and that he and others, who act with him, are totally unprepared at present, to take any other steps to arrest the progress of arbitrary power, than those of petitioning for the assembling of a Parliament, and protesting against the proceedings of the Court. He added, that all other measures would be mere madness, and justly subject the movers thereof to punishment."

"Did he say no more?" asked the Earl, in a low but earnest tone.

"No, my lord," replied his son; "he was evidently, as I have already said, alarmed by the tenor of your note to Lord Howard, and was anxious to know the contents of a letter

to which it referred, addressed by you to Charles Maldon there."

"Russell must have known more," murmured the Earl, evidently much agitated; "he must have heard of the arrest of Shepherd and Rumsey, and the rest—or perhaps even more," and he took a step or two up and down the hall.

"I remember now," said Lord Francis, as his father approached again, "that Lord Russell told me, without making it a part of the message to you, that there were many sinister reports about the town of plots to assassinate the king; and also, that in your note to Lord Howard, after referring to your letter to Charles Maldon, you had said, that whatever is to be done, had better be done quickly."

"I must have that letter destroyed, or I am lost," said the Earl in a low tone; but not so low as to escape his son's ear. Lord Francis was seriously alarmed at such an admission, and still more at the unwonted emotion which he beheld in one so careful, and so much habituated to conceal all his feelings. "Had you not better ask my cousin to give it up?" he said.

The Earl of Virepont started, for he saw that his rebellious thoughts had found voice against his will; but Lord Francis went on. "Ask him, my lord, ask him. As a man of honour, he cannot refuse. The letter can in no degree tend to his safety, and its destruction may tend to yours."

"He says he has lost it," replied the Earl, in a gloomy tone, laying great emphasis on the word "says."

"Lost it!" cried Lord Francis; "what, a letter of such importance? How—where did he lose it?"

"There he sits," answered his father, pointing to him whom we have so long seen as Lord Alcester, who by this time had sunk into a seat at the end of the table, and lay with his face buried in his arms. "There he sits, ask him himself. He tells me a long story, and hardly a probable one, of having cast it down on a table, where somehow there were lying letters between him and the woman he seduced—that Henrietta Compton. That, in a fit of passion at something between them, he swept them all off and trampled on them, and that when he returned, she and the letters had both gone from Malwood."

"Then let him seek her, and require her to give this letter up," said Lord Francis; "she will do it if she has it, I am sure."

"He went to London for the purpose immediately he discovered it was gone," rejoined the Earl, "at least so he assures me; and, returning about two this day, he sent over to tell me, that if she has it, she will not give it up. Thus,

through treachery, or idle heedlessness, you may be soon Earl of Virepont, Francis."

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed the young nobleman in great agitation; "this is too terrible to be thought of—I will go to her myself—I will beseech her—oh, yes, she will give it to me. She is no mean ordinary being. Speak to him, my lord! Ask him where she is to be found!—I cannot do it—I think I shall go mad."

"Francis," said the Earl, taking his hand and speaking in a tone of unusual tenderness, "you are much moved, my son—I did not expect this."

"Oh, my father!" cried the young nobleman, "am I not your child? What though I may differ from your views in some things? What though I may wish much had never been done that is done? Does that change the blood in my veins? Ah, no! If to pour out the last drop of that blood could save you from danger, I should dishonour my mother did I not pour it out without a thought. But let us not waste time. Ask him, my father, and I will set out directly. I know her, and feel sure of her. She might refuse him, indignant at his treatment; but she will not refuse me, who have never either loved or left her."

The Earl gazed at him long and earnestly, then pressed his hand hard, and turned to Charles Maldon.

"Charles," he said, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "your cousin Francis has given me news which renders it absolutely necessary that my letter to you should be found and destroyed without delay; and he wishes you to let him know where he can find the poor girl, Henrietta Compton, that he may seek to persuade her to give it up, if she possesses it."

The young man started up at the Earl's first word, and scowled at him with a fierce, wild expression of countenance, "Found and destroyed!" he said, "how should I find it now? Have I not searched every possible place? Have I not gone to London to seek it? But why should I do more than I have done, were more possible? You think of yourselves alone; you give not one thought to me; you see me ruined, beggared—deprived by a pitiful trick of my inheritance and my rights—but you care not for that. Had he not concealed his existence—had he not spread the report of his death—he would have been an outlaw; and rank, lands, name, all mine; and now he comes to take from me my prosperity, and plunge me into the lowest penury—but you heed not that. It is the letter! the letter! nought is sought for, nought is cared for, but the letter. Seek it, and find it if you can, for yourselves—I will have no more to do with it."

"Charles Maldon," said Lord Francis, coming forward, "are you a man of honour?"

His cousin started up, and laid his hand upon his sword; but the young nobleman continued in the same calm and resolute tone in which he had asked the question. "Touch not your sword, good cousin; I but remind you of yourself, I trust. If you are a man of honour, you must feel that you have no right, even in carelessness, to betray the confidence reposed in you, and that you cannot do too much to repair an act which may by your fault bring peril upon another. Rouse yourself, Charles Maldon, to a sense of what is due to yourself as well as to my father; and if for the future you would bear the name of honesty, lose not an hour, cease not a moment, until a letter put under the safeguard of your honour, is found and restored to him who wrote it. You say we care not for you, nor for the unfortunate circumstances in which you are placed. I own it—at the present moment I think not of you, for this is the first and most important question; let that be resolved, and you are sure in this house to find sympathy and kindness. But still I might ask, if you have thought of others before yourself, through life? I might ask, if you have sought the happiness even of those who loved you, in preference to your own mere pleasures? But these considerations are all beside the question. It is to your honesty and honour I appeal; and, if you would save your name from everlasting disgrace, you will not rest one instant till this letter is found. If you had treated Henrietta well—if you had loved her as she loved you—if you had done towards her as you blame us for not doing now, and thought of her instead of yourself, the letter would never have been lost. The least, then, you can do, is to say where I can find her; and that may be some atonement for having so carelessly treated that which was trusted to you in full confidence. Come, Charles Maldon, bethink yourself of a better and a nobler course than you have hitherto pursued. Prosperity to you has been like sunshine upon a waste, producing weeds; but I am sure the soil beneath is good; and if you will cultivate it, adversity will be the best fortune that ever yet befel you. Give me your hand, Charles. We have never been great friends hitherto: it shall be your fault if we are not so for the future."

The young man looked up, and took his cousin's hand. "I am crushed," he said, "but I will make an effort. When do you go, Francis?"

"This very night," replied the young nobleman; "no time must be lost."

"Not to-night," said the Earl; "you have ridden long."

and far, my son, and cannot have had many hours' rest. Set off at dawn to-morrow, if you will."

"No, indeed, my father," answered Francis de Vipont, "this very night; ay, and within an hour. Some slight refreshment and a cup of wine, a few brief words to our dear Emmeline, and I am ready. Horses I must have, for mine are all over-ridden; but there are plenty in the stable."

"We will go by Malwood," said Charles Maldon; "there are enough fresh horses there, and we are well nigh twenty miles upon our way."

"We?" said Lord Francis, in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes; I go with you," answered his cousin. "I will not force myself upon her sight; for she must hate me—nay, I know she does; but I will accompany you to her door."

"Hate is the lesson easiest to unlearn in the true woman's heart," replied Lord Francis; "true love never, Charles. Now I go to Emmeline, and will be with you, my father, at supper, in a few minutes. I feel relief to my heart already, when actively seeking to retrieve what has gone amiss."

The Earl mused for several moments in deep thought; and, when he raised his eyes again, they had lost no small portion of their gloom.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE large sitting-room, in which Lord Russell and his family usually were to be found in hours of relaxation, contained no one but Lady Russell, when Gertrude Ellerton returned, and laying down the parchment on the table, gazed at her sweet hostess with her beautiful face full of anxious eagerness.

"Where is Lord Russell, dear lady?" Gertrude said at once. "I wish, if possible, to see him directly, for I have a great deal to tell him."

"You have brought the pardon back, I perceive," replied Lady Russell; "what is the matter, my fair Gertrude? Do not alarm yourself too much, whatever be the case. Many a seeming danger passes quick away, and that piece of sheep-skin secures good Sir William from all real risk. Lord Russell has just this moment left the room to go to bed. He is not very well, and complains of headache."

"I ought to see him," said Gertrude, thoughtfully; "for I promised to tell him what has happened instantly; and Henry seemed to think that it affected your good lord himself; though how that can be, I do not know."

"What is it, Gertrude?" asked Lady Russell, with a very slight degree of anxiety apparent in her fine countenance.

"I will bear any message to him; and, doubtless, he is not

yet in bed, so that if he requires any further tidings he can come down. Collect your thoughts, my Gertrude. It can be no very serious matter, I think."

"Tell him, dear lady," replied her beautiful companion, "that when I went to the house where my father has been concealed, I found it deserted by every one but a maid, and that I found Shepherd the merchant had been arrested this evening on a charge of treason."

"And your father?" asked Lady Russell, on whom the news of Shepherd's apprehension produced no effect, "what of him, Gertrude?"

"Of him I could obtain no tidings," replied the beautiful girl; "he was gone, but that was all that the woman could tell. But, dear lady, let Lord Russell know at once what I have said; for a gentleman whom I met at the door, seemed to think your noble lord would judge this man's arrest a matter of much moment."

"Indeed!" said Lady Russell, rising, "I will not delay, then;" and she quitted the room.

In less than five minutes, through the door which the lady had left open behind her, Gertrude saw Lord Russell and his wife advancing along the corridor. His face was grave, but not agitated; and when he came in, he took the fair girl's hand kindly, saying, "I am sorry, dear Gertrude, that you have not had the satisfaction of giving your father the pleasant tidings of his pardon to-night; but do not be alarmed. No harm can happen now that the seal is on the parchment. Tell me all that has occurred, for I am somewhat interested in this matter."

Gertrude did as he requested, in a hurried and confused manner, it is true; and the account of Shepherd's apprehension, and the search for papers which had been made, threw her noble hearer into deep meditation. Lady Russell sat and watched his countenance with an anxious eye, as the light of the tapers fell upon his tall forehead and fine aristocratic features, to which strong and grave thought gave a moral dignity and power.

"I can see what is likely to follow," said Lord Russell, at length; "it is found needful to support despotism by persecution; and as, in all such trades, the tools must be first selected and sharpened, Shepherd will, doubtless, under due tuition, prove a useful instrument. Did you hear of any other arrests, Gertrude?"

"Of none," replied the young lady; "for as soon as I had ascertained that my father was not in the house, I came back home, as Henry thought the matter might have interest for your lord."

"It has, indeed!" replied her noble friend; "but who is this gallant Henry, dear Gertrude, if the question be a fair one; this chivalrous defender of ladies against two such dapper giants as Howard of Escrick, and the young Lord Alcester?"

"He said I might tell you the message came from him," answered Gertrude, "and, therefore, I have no scruple. It is my father's cousin, Henry Maldon, who was so long supposed dead."

"And is he really living?" exclaimed Lord Russell, in a tone of much surprise. "Why, the intelligence received was positive, that the vessel perished with every soul on board. She was seen to go down by the people of the 'Royal Charles' off Cape Grisez."

"But he was saved by a boat from the shore," replied Gertrude. "We have known it long; but he concealed himself carefully, lest a proclamation of outlawry should issue against him, and he should be deprived of his rights."

"Then he is Baron Alcester!" exclaimed Lady Russell, "and inherits all the old lord's estates. This is a strange turn of fortune, indeed!"

"I suppose it is so," replied Gertrude; "but he only told me that measures had been taken to render his return quite secure."

"Security, my dear child!" said Lord Russell, in a gloomy tone; "who can ever feel in security in this unstable world? Each moment has its peril on its wings, and those which pass nearest to us are often not to be seen, while those more distant scare us and fly away. There is but one trust, but one security—that is in God. His will be done; and whatever follows the arrest of Shepherd, it shall not deprive me of one hour of rest. But let me hear more of this young lord's insolence. He deserves chastisement, and Lord Howard still more. He must have known my liveries, and could not act in ignorance."

"Lord Alcester is not aware of my name," answered Gertrude; "he has only seen me before, my lord, as a cottage-girl; and yet I do think it hard that innocence and poverty cannot go without insult from wealth and vice. Had he known who I am, he would not have dared to treat me as he has; and yet Alice Hennage might have been quite as honest as Gertrude Ellerton."

"Too true, my Gertrude," said Lady Russell; "there are many such things in society which want reforming."

"So many, that the task were endless," said Lord Russell. "Sydney thinks this same state of society is like an old clock, only to be mended by breaking it all to pieces; but the task

of constructing a new one would, I fear, be beyond any of our powers. As to Lord Howard, however, I will take care he shall have reproof, if not correction; and, in regard to the other young man, I suspect, if Henry Maldon has returned, that his pride and his vice will be starved together for want of means; and now, dear Gertrude, good-night. My head has been aching all the evening, and your story has not relieved it; for the most radical cure of headache that I know of, is not the one I should like applied in my own instance."

He spoke with a faint smile, and left her; and after having remained for a few moments in deep thought, Lady Russell rose also to retire. With an agitated mind, Gertrude Ellerton laid her head upon her pillow, but it was many an hour before she found repose. She did not sleep later than usual, however, and was down the next morning early. Lord and Lady Russell appeared soon after, and in that nobleman not the slightest difference of manner could be seen from his ordinary demeanour. Lady Russell, however, looked anxious; and in the course of the morning, her apprehensions were increased by the various rumours which were brought in by different visitors. One reported that a serious plot was discovered, that a number of persons had been arrested, that a promise of pardon had been made to two or three upon a full disclosure of the facts, and that the king had been sent for from Hampton Court, and was expected in town immediately. Every narrator varied as to the names of the prisoners, but amongst others, those of Colonel Rumsey and West the lawyer were mentioned, as well as that of Colonel Wildman. Lord Russell himself made few observations, and put few questions; but Lady Russell was more eager in her inquiries, and the sum of the accurate information obtained before dinner-time was, that several persons had been certainly apprehended, and amongst them Colonel Wildman, and that a proclamation had been issued, offering a reward for the arrest of a number of others, in the list of whom appeared West and Rumsey.

The dinner was scarcely concluded, however, when Algernon Sydney made his appearance, and seated himself for a few minutes, talking in a gay and lively manner to Lady Russell and Gertrude, but mingling an unusual portion of bitterness with his sallies.

The subject uppermost in Lady Russell's thoughts would have voice, however; and she asked at length, as he did not approach the topic himself, whether he had heard anything of the rumoured plot.

"Oh, dear lady, this is an age of plots and rumours

of plots," said Sydney. "Every day has its own; and, to tell the truth, I am puzzled to distinguish between that of yesterday, that of to-day, and that of to-morrow. There is a great manufactory thereof set up at White Hall, or somewhere in that neighbourhood, and we have them hot every morning like baker's rolls. As I passed by White Hall just now, I saw two small field-pieces before the secretary's door, with a crowd of boys and idle sluts looking at them; I ventured to go up and inquire whether the place was in a state of siege, and thereupon I discovered that these two guns, which I remember as well as possible, having seen them in the garden at York House, in Buckingham's time—for they are not of this country's manufacture at all—had just been seized in Wildman's stables, and taken as a proof of an awful plot for the destruction of the monarchy. Now, it so happens, that the poor innocent field-pieces are more likely a great deal to blow up any plot that meddles with them, than to give it assistance. In the first place, I don't think they would carry a four-pound shot, and in the next place they are so honeycombed, that I should not like to be the man to fire them in cold blood, although I am not very timid."

"Did you know anything of Wildman, Sydney?" said Lord Russell; "you must have been acquainted with him in former times, I think."

"Oh dear, yes!" answered his friend; "I knew him in Cromwell's time; and a more honest man does not live. He was no friend of the Protector's, for he was an enemy to monarchy, and cared not a straw whether it came under the name of a Protector, deriving his power from an overawed Parliament, and an intimidated people, or under that of a King, who went higher up for his authority, and forged the name of God to his title-deeds. Upon my word, that is the most absurd and blasphemous pretension that was ever put forth: if God had made kings, he would have made them better; and although we know very well that he was offended at a people for choosing one, I never heard of his having expressed any approbation at such a proceeding."

"But what do you know more of Wildman?" asked Lord Russell. "Have you seen him lately?"

"Oh dear, yes!" answered the other, "a hundred times. He is the best physician and chemist that I know. By his advice, I am let blood every spring-tide, as a remedy against cholera in these perilous times. Come, my dear lord, will you walk out and see these field-pieces? Methinks they will scarcely manufacture a good plot out of such rotten materials."

Lord Russell agreed at once, and quitted the house with

his friend, while Lady Russell and Gertrude remained in some anxiety, the one for her husband, the other for her father. No news of Sir William Ellerton had been yet received, and his daughter could not help feeling apprehensive, notwithstanding the assurance that she felt of all further persecution in regard to the pretended Popish plot being at an end. The evening of that day passed more tranquilly than the morning had done; no further news was obtained of the proceedings of the court, or the examination of the prisoners. Many persons treated the whole story of the plot with ridicule; and few seemed to believe that any serious results would follow the investigations which were taking place. Lord Russell himself spoke little on the subject; but yet what he did say did not tend to relieve Lady Russell's apprehensions.

"The proceedings in regard to the election of Sheriffs," he observed, in answer to something which was said by the old Duke of Bedford, "must necessarily be followed by measures in the same direction. The Court removes its weaker opponents from places of trust, the nomination to which justly rests with the people. This is done under the pretence of law. The same pretence of law may be found for removing sturdier opponents still from the face of the earth; for there are always bad men and wicked men enough in the world to afford by their guilty designs a plea for striking at a whole party. If the faults of a few members of a corporation justify the taking away a charter not only from the actually existing members, but from their successors for ever,—a most outrageous iniquity!—we may easily conceive that the crimes of a few members of a party will be made to justify the taking away the lives of its leaders. That is the object at present, depend upon it; and the only trust is that, under God's mercy, the means will fail these people, either by purer crimes than we have lately had, or by some deficiency of evidence." Such words were not very hopeful; and a gloom came over the cheerful household of Southampton Place,—a dark cloud that was never to be raised again.

"One alleviating circumstance, however, occurred to give better repose to Gertrude's pillow. As she was retiring to rest, a note containing a few words in her father's writing, was placed in her hands. "I am well, dearest Gertrude, and in safety," so wrote Sir William Ellerton; "but I have been forced to remove in haste from the house of the wine merchant, Shepherd. The friend who bears you this will tell you more, and will let you know how and where to find

"Where is the person who brought this note?" asked

Gertrude, eagerly, addressing the maid who had given it to her.

"The men in the hall, madam, told him that you had gone to bed," was the maid's reply; "and so he went away, saying that he would call again to-morrow."

"That is unfortunate indeed," said Gertrude, "but it cannot be helped. Pray take the note to Lady Russell, if she be yet in her dressing-room, with my grateful love. I know she will be glad to hear the news it contains."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THERE was hardly a word spoken between Lord Francis de Vipont and his cousin as they rode over the hills towards Malwood Park. It was not that the young nobleman did not take part in the bitter grief and disappointment which he knew must fill the cup of Charles Maldon to overflowing; it was not even that his thoughts were so much occupied with the dangerous situation of his father as to exclude all else. His was not a mind to rest upon the idea of peril with long and brooding apprehensions. He was actively engaged in the only course that seemed likely to avert that which was to be dreaded; and, with him, activity was hope. But he thought it better to let the first effect of the terrible reverse which his cousin had met with, subside, before he offered consolation or endeavoured to give a new direction to thought and endeavour. He knew Henry Maldon well, and thoroughly judged of his feelings and purposes, partly by previous acquaintance with his character, and partly by that intuitive perception which one high heart has of the movements of another; and he felt sure that his stern and fierce demeanor towards one weaker and less noble than himself was, at least in a degree, assumed for a good and kind object; that it was intended to awaken and reform, and that it would pass away as soon as the object was attained. He would not for the world have weakened its effect; he would not have given any insight into the cause or the design; but he knew that despair often plunges into worse evil than that of which it is so frequently a consequence; and he determined, as soon as thought should have somewhat relieved the load, or at least accustomed his companion to bear it, to endeavour to rouse hope, and seek her aid in guiding his cousin into a better path than he had hitherto chosen.

All was dark around them as they rode on—as dark as the imaginations of Charles Maldon's breast. The sky was covered with clouds, no moon even softened the blackness of the air; to ride fast was impossible, for the marking out of

the hill road could hardly be traced ; and yet rapid motion was necessary to both. Gloomy,—gloomy were the reveries of him who had seen rank and fortune, and the smile which prosperity ever gains from the mercenary world, snatched away from him in a moment. He thought of the pleasures he had lost,—of the zest with which he had enjoyed them,—of the proud station he had occupied,—of the wide means of incessant change and gratification which had seemed his own. He thought of it all with dark regret. With the memory of indulgence past there is mingled almost always something bitter, rising up from the bottom of the fountain, even when the waters of joy are still bubbling forth ; but when the sweeter stream is stopped, apparently for ever, as in his case, the spring becomes abundant in those bitter drops. He thought then of the pleasures, but he thought, too, of how he had abused them ;—he thought of the lofty station from which he had fallen, but he felt that he had not used it aright ;—he thought of the vast means once at his command, and he wished—oh ! how he wished—that he had employed them better ! The love of Henrietta, too,—the long-enduring, tender, devoted love of her whom he had so deeply and so basely injured,—seemed now to his eyes as he had once thought it would be for ever, the brightest, the sweetest, the dearest ornament of life. Oh, what would he not have given at that moment to recall all the past, at least as it regarded her, to have preserved her affection against that hour of trial,—to have bound her to himself by a holy and a happy tie. “She would not have abandoned me now,” he thought ; “she would have been at my side to comfort, to support, to cheer, to guide me. She would have shared poverty with me as gladly as wealth ; she would have brightened the humble cottage as well as adorned the lordly hall ; she would have rendered adversity light, and labour easy ; she would have been my guardian against evil, my inspiration to good.”

He had many faults, great and sad ones, and many weaknesses, dangerous both to others and to himself ; but it must be said in his favour, that the very first effect of adversity was towards improvement. For a moment, indeed, he had felt inclined to struggle and resist ; and perhaps, could there have been the slightest doubt of his cousin's identity, he might have been led to oppose his claims, and by the very act might have been drawn away, step by step, from better feelings. But the matter was too clear for doubt ; and though he had never seen him but once or twice in his own childhood, the instant recognition of the Earl of Virepont put all suspense on that subject at an end. From that time he never thought of resistance. The blow was struck ; his prosperity had

passed away from him, and nothing remained of the past but regret and remorse. The future, too, was all dark as despair could make it;—there seemed not one ray of hope. If his cousin were as exacting as he threatened, there was nought but a prison before him for life. His own patrimony was all squandered; a large debt had been contracted under the false impression of being wealthy, and he had not made himself friends even of the mammon of unrighteousness while he had possessed it. To whom could he turn for help?—of whom could he ask counsel? His companion of the way was the only one; but there was yet a lingering of pride in his nature. He knew little of Lord Francis; had seldom seen him; and then there was a high and commanding tone about him which had wounded his vanity. He could not seek advice from him, though he would not have refused it had it been offered; but for more than half of the way to Malwood, Lord Francis remained nearly silent, leaving, as I have said, thought to work within.

At length, however, the young nobleman spoke: "We must go cautiously here, Charles," he said; "down these steep hills, and in this pitch-dark night we risk breaking our horses' knees as I did yesterday. We can ride faster when we get upon the high road beyond Malwood."

"I shall be glad to ride fast then," replied his cousin, "after I have seen Malwood for the last time. I think I should little care if I broke my own neck as well as my horse's knees. This has been a terrible blow, Lord Francis."

"It must have been, indeed," replied his companion. "The first shock is, of course, very severe; but when that is past, I am not sure that you may not find it a more fortunate event than you will,—than you can now admit."

"First or last, it is terrible," replied the young man. "Fortunate!—Good Heaven! how can it be fortunate?"

"I am afraid you will comprehend me with difficulty, Charles," said his cousin; "and time only will make you understand how it may be fortunate."

"But let me hear,—let me hear!" cried the other. "You know not of what value would be the least ray of hope to me at this present moment."

"Oh, you may find many, Charles," replied Lord Francis; "no man at your age, with talents, health, and courage, can be without hope. The wide field of enterprise is open before you, exertion will bring comfort for disappointment, and the proud satisfaction of carving out fortune and raising a high name for yourself may compensate for much."

"How am I to carve out fortune in a prison?" asked Charles Maldon. "Did you not hear him? He said he

would exact the uttermost penny of all that I had received since the death of my grandfather ; and what have I to pay it with ? Do you not know that I sold, two years ago, the Hertfordshire estate, which was my father's, and that it is all gone ?”

“ I did not, indeed,” replied Lord Francis ; “ but of course Henry will give you time. However, it was not alone in mere material results that I thought this might prove more fortunate, or less unfortunate, if you will, than you imagine. I think, Charles, that you have hitherto taken a wrong view of the objects of life, and, consequently, of its pleasures and its pains. Man's life has two parts, as well as man himself,—the corporeal and the mental ; and as each one of us chooses to exist for one or the other, so are we subject to, or independent of, the caprice of fortune. I trust, and am sure, that the reverse which has befallen you, terrible as it may seem now, will give you a new view and a better one, of that which is not only worthy, but happy to seek. You will look back to the past with wonder, that you thought the things which then gave you satisfaction were the only objects of enjoyment ; and perhaps with some shame that you found enjoyment in them at all. New sources of pleasure will open to you each day as you advance ; and you will discover that these do not perish nor leave bitterness behind,—that as fortune did not give them, fortune cannot take them away. I think so, my dear cousin, because I am convinced that you have powers for better things, and because I am certain that, if the same events which have occurred to you, who have enjoyed the mere material part of life so keenly, had happened to me, who have indulged therein but little, I should have felt the reverse much less bitterly. So long as competence can be obtained, I believe as much true happiness may be found in the humblest as in the highest dwelling.”

“ But shall I have competence ?” demanded Charles Maldon, gloomily.

“ Certainly, if you struggle energetically for it,” answered his cousin ; “ the first thing, depend upon it, Charles, is to look upon a new life with a different eye : to resolve, firmly and strongly, to grapple with the change which fortune has forced upon you, and to wring from it all the benefits which it is capable of yielding : to cast away vain regrets, and make ready for the future as a new being. As you cannot fit your fate to yourself, fit yourself to your fate ; and it is wonderful how soon you will find difficulties vanish, disgusts disappear, and new sources of pleasure spring up where you least expected them. If there be anything in the past which goes beyond regret—anything I mean, that you condemn, repair it

as far as you have means, so that the shadow of things that you have left behind, may not cloud the sunshine of those before you. I know Henry well—as a brother; and I know that, though stern and rigorous towards wrong, there is not at heart a kinder man upon earth.”

“I could not be beholden to his bounty,” said the other, proudly.

“But you may to his forbearance,” replied Lord Francis; “nay, you must, if you would have success.”

Charles Maldon fell into silence; but the way was opened, there had been advice given and listened to, and it could never be difficult to ask it again. A firm and powerful mind, in adversity as in prosperity, stands by its own strength; but his was not originally powerful, and it was, moreover, enfeebled by want of wholesome exercise and too long success. He needed something to lean against under the tempest.

Nevertheless, he showed more energy, or more of something like it, when they reached Malwood, than Lord Francis had expected. The horses were ordered out at once, but while they were being prepared, the young man so lately master there, gave orders calmly, clearly, and rapidly, for removing everything that was his own from the house. His horses and servants were ordered to follow him to London; the domestics who had been retained of the old lord's household, were desired to remain, and instructions were given for packing up and bringing to the capital his own private effects. He had not the courage, indeed, to mention what had occurred, to say that he was no longer master there, to tell his attendants that he had no right to the title they bestowed. It was a dark moment, too, when, followed by two servants of his own and three of his cousin's, he rode away from the gates within which he had passed so brief a period of revelry and joy.

Nothing was said for some way, although, as they passed the cottage where Gertrude Ellerton had lived for two years, Lord Francis turned his eyes towards his companion's face, with feelings which he could hardly master. It was too dark for the expression of Charles Maldon's features to be seen, and he said not a word till they reached the spot where the cross-road entered the highway. Still the depressing power of adversity was busy at his heart, making him view all things differently, and at length, he said, “Did you see that cottage, Lord Francis?”

“Yes,” replied his cousin, abruptly.

“Connected therewith,” continued the other, “are some events which I regret much. There used to live there, with her grandmother, one of the loveliest beings I ever saw, called Alice Hennage, and I persecuted her shamefully. For her,

too, I neglected and ill-treated my poor Henrietta; and this fair girl herself I drove away, by my threats, from her own home, to wander about the world. I do hope that no evil will befall her; and yet I have my fears, for I saw her only last night about this hour, in the streets of London, with a torch and an old servant with her, and dressed far above her station."

"Set your mind at rest on that score," replied Lord Francis, "she is quite safe. Do you know who she really is?"

"No," replied the young man; "is she other than she seemed?"

"Yes," answered Lord Francis, sharply; "her name is Gertrude Ellerton, and she is my promised wife."

Charles Maldon hardly kept his seat on his horse, so confounded was he with the tidings that he heard. For a moment he could not find voice to speak. "Good Heaven! Lord Francis," he exclaimed, at length, "how shall I excuse my conduct? I give you my honour that I knew not ~~who~~ she was until this moment."

"Then Sir Frederick Beltingham did not tell you?" said Lord Francis, gravely.

"Never!" exclaimed the young man; "did he know?"

"Perfectly," replied his companion; "nay, more, when she left the cottage, he traced her out, by a forged letter purporting to be from her father, lured her to an inn near Morington, and was proceeding grossly to insult her, when, luckily, Lord Russell and Algernon Sydney came to her aid, and the latter passed his sword through the traitor's body."

"The villain! the detestable villain!" cried Charles Maldon. "He lied even to the last, when I rode over in haste to see him—in such haste, that I left your father's letter behind. He never told me who she was, but assured me that he had sought her out for me, and would have brought her back to Malwood, if he had not been interrupted and wounded so severely."

"Ay, Charles," answered Lord Francis, "when one chooses such companions, one must expect to be betrayed. He is an unprincipled villain, and always was, and as such ought never to have been your friend. I do believe that he led you to many a thing which you might not otherwise have done."

His cousin fell into thought again; he would not admit that he had been led; for men will confess vice or crime, but not acknowledge weakness or folly. He clearly saw, however, that if Beltingham had not actually persuaded him to much that was evil, he had at least suggested it, and the cold hint, the sneer, with its serpent's sting, the laugh at all that was right and good, still rang in his ear, and showed him how

much truth there was in what his cousin said. They were now riding on faster, and did not draw a rein till they were within thirty miles of London, where it became necessary to give their horses food and water. The people of the inn where they stopped were with difficulty roused from their beds; but at length the door was opened, and the two gentlemen walked into the public-room, while their servants attended to their horses. Lights were lighted, and as usual in those days, Lord Francis called for a jug of wine "for the good of the house." As he turned to his cousin, however, he remarked how deadly pale and haggard he looked, and he said, "Had you not better lie down to rest for an hour, Charles? You seem very weary; if we set off two hours hence we shall reach London by eight, and we could not well intrude upon the lady before."

Charles Maldon shook his head; "I must not lie down," he said, "for fear I should not rise again. I am very tired, for I rode all last night, and have not slept since. But why I should be more tired than you, I do not see, unless it be that all the grief and disappointment I have met with during these last few days has shaken me. You did the same, I think."

"No, I slept for several hours last night," replied Lord Francis; "but take some wine, at all events. I hope you have brought your best, my host?"

"There is not better within the four seas," answered the landlord, as usual on such occasions; and Charles Maldon drank eagerly more than one-half of the quantity that was placed before them.

When they set out again the sun had risen, and the sky over-head was blue, but to the southward heavy clouds appeared, advancing slowly through space, like the dark masses of an army manœuvring in a plain, while some lighter spots of vapour skimmed across them with a quicker wind. Very speedily a grey shade spread over the sky, the sun was dimmed, and volume after volume of loaded clouds rolled up, till at length the drops began to fall, and a low growl of thunder was heard in the sky. They were crossing one of the many bleak heaths which lie within no great distance of the English capital, and no shelter was to be found, if they had been inclined to seek it. "This is unfortunate," said Lord Francis, looking in his cousin's face, which was now flushed with the wine.

"I like it," replied Charles Maldon; "it refreshes me."

The rain came down thicker and thicker, however, in large, pouring, heavy drops, drenching them to the skin, while faint across the grey expanse flashed the dimmed lightning. It lasted not long, indeed; for at the end of an hour all was

over, and a warm summer sun shining out and licking up the moisture.

Lord Francis de Vipont felt it very warm, and threw his cloak over the saddle before him, but Charles Maldon, on the contrary, lost the flushed cheek, grew paler and more pale, and at length an aguish shiver passed over him.

"We must be near London now, I think," he said; "at least I hope so, for I would fain reach it."

"You are ill, Charles," said his cousin. "You had better stop at the first inn we come to. I can very well go on alone; and if you do not intend to see this poor young lady, I do not perceive what result your proceeding with me could produce."

"I did not intend to go in," said Charles Maldon, "till you had seen her yourself. Then if she gave up the letter, well and good, our object was accomplished. If she refused you, however, then I intended to go in and beseech her on my knees, if it were necessary, by all the memories of other days, when she loved me, and we were happy, to save my honour, and not let me stand recorded for ever as the betrayer of the trust reposed in me. It must be done, Francis, and I will go on, if I die at her door."

His cousin tried in vain to dissuade him; but there was a stronger power upon him; and by the time he had arrived at the distance of two miles from London, Charles Maldon could not sit his horse. All that could be done for him was to lead, almost to carry him forward to a small inn by the road side, where carriers with their pack-horses usually stopped for a short time on entering or quitting London. There, he was borne to a room, and placed in bed; and promising to send a physician from the capital as soon as he arrived, Lord Francis, furnished with Henrietta's address, left his cousin in the care of his own attendants, and rode on as fast as possible to the city.

At that early hour it was not difficult to find one of the many men of healing in the metropolis disengaged, and prepared to go at once to the sick man; and exacting a promise from the one he selected to remain with Charles Maldon till his return, Lord Francis put up his horses at an inn, and proceeded on foot to the house of the grocer Griesly. In answer to his inquiries, he was told that the lady was up, and, giving his name, he was admitted at once.

With quivering lip and varying colour, Henrietta received him, still graceful in her agitation, and pointed to a seat, without venturing to speak. But Lord Francis took her hand kindly, and said, "Forgive me for intruding upon you, dear lady, but I have come upon a matter of deep moment to me

and mine. I think I know you sufficiently to trust you fully, and to feel sure that nothing I say will be ever repeated by you."

"Assuredly, my lord," she answered; "I am not so base as to betray any trust reposed in me. Pray be seated, and let me know the object of your visit."

"The case is this," replied Lord Francis; "my father, some five or six days ago, wrote a letter to my cousin, containing matter which, if it fall into evil hands, may prove most dangerous. The words, I have every reason to believe, were rash and perilous in the extreme. He sent it over to Malwood at a time when you were speaking to my cousin Charles——"

"I have it not, my lord—upon my life! upon my word! I have it not," cried Henrietta, clasping her hands together. "Oh, believe me, Lord Francis, I would not tell you a falsehood for the world. Lord Alcester was here yesterday, seeking this very letter; and I assured him I had not got it. I think he spoke as he should not have spoken to me; and my answers were short and decided; but when he was gone, I examined carefully, lest I should be wronging him, which God forbid! but I assure you, it is not in my possession, or I would give it up to you at once."

Lord Francis fixed his eyes upon the ground, in sad and anxious thought. "This is terrible," he murmured; "I know not what to do or what to think."

"Do not imagine that I have got it," said Henrietta. "I may be very weak and very faulty, my lord, but I am not false or treacherous."

"I do not think it for a moment," answered Lord Francis; "my only fear is, that it has fallen into less honourable hands. My errand, then, is now done, and I will take my leave, in order to consult with some friends as to what further measures I can adopt."

"I beseech you, if you see him," said Henrietta, rising likewise, "assure Lord Alcester that I do not possess this letter. I should not wish his lordship to suspect that I would deceive him in that or any other thing."

"I will do so," answered Lord Francis; "but I must tell you, lady, that he whom you call Lord Alcester is so no longer. Rank, fortune, everything which he possessed, has passed away from him, by the return of his cousin, so long supposed dead."

Henrietta sank down into her chair again, and gazed at him in surprise and anxiety. "I do not understand," she said, at length; "is he not Lord Alcester?"

"No, indeed," replied her visitor; "he fancied himself so;

but his father had an elder brother, whose son fled during the persecution following the pretended Popish plot. The vessel in which he went, was wrecked in sight of the 'Royal Charles,' and the news came that every soul perished. This prevented a writ of outlawry from issuing; but Henry Maldon has returned, and neither having been attainted nor outlawed, the title and estates devolve to him of right. Charles can offer no opposition, nor does he seek it; though his cousin's coming renders him a beggar."

As Lord Francis spoke, he watched Henrietta's countenance earnestly; but the expressions, many and various, which passed over it puzzled him. By fine shades, grief and astonishment blended with a look of joy and satisfaction; and he asked himself, "Can she rejoice in his misfortune?" but yet there was something high and noble in the eyes, which forbade such an interpretation. She raised them, too, to Heaven; and no one can do so, at least he thought not, with malignant feelings in the heart.

"How does he bear it?" asked the lady, after a pause."

"He bore it with more firmness than I expected," answered Lord Francis, "considering that he has not alone lost everything, but that a large debt has been contracted in respect of rents which he has received without right, and spent too foolishly, I fear. He would have borne up well, I believe; but he has been much fatigued during these last few days, by riding without sleep and with little refreshment, to and from London, in less than six-and-thirty hours. We met with a severe storm, too, which wetted him completely, and his clothes dried in the sun. All this, acting upon a body weakened by depression of mind, has made him very ill, and at length he was not able to sit his horse."

Henrietta started up. "Where is he to be found?" she cried, panting with eagerness, and holding her hand upon her heart. "I will go to him. O, let me go to him!" But the next moment she passed her hand over her brow, and sank back into her seat, murmuring, "I promised not—I vowed I would not—Oh, God! this is hard!"

"I do not understand you rightly, my dear lady," said Lord Francis, approaching and taking her hand, much moved by her agitation. "I am the last to wish or advise you to return to Charles Maldon, under the circumstances in which you were placed before; but I see no reason, in his present state, why you, who look upon yourself as his wife, as you once told me, should not seek to comfort him, and tend him in this illness, into which he has fallen—severe, as I cannot hide from myself, that it will be; provided you leave him again as soon as he recovers, if, indeed, he should ever do so."

"I have promised," she answered, "solemnly promised, not to do so, when no such evil was foreseen. I dare not—must not do it. Yet, stay, my lord; tell me where he is to be found; let me know what attendance he has—tell me all, I beseech you. Perhaps I may be relieved from that promise."

"He is now at a small inn, called the Packhorse, on the road to the little town of Illington," replied Lord Francis; "there I was obliged to leave him while I rode on, but he has two servants with him, and I sent a physician to visit him, and remain with him till my return."

"Oh, send the gentleman to tell me how it goes with him," said Henrietta; "you are going back at once, I trust. He must need care—kindly kindred care, not the tendance of grooms and horse-boys."

"I must first strive to find my cousin Henry," answered her visitor, "and then I must see Lord Russell. After that I will go to him; but, alas! it is not to stay, for I must hurry back, as fast as horses will carry me, to Ellerton Castle, to communicate with my father."

Henrietta's mind seemed to rest upon one word which he had uttered. "Henry?" she said, meditating, "Henry Maldon—your cousin? I think it must be so. What manner of man is he? I must have seen him, I think."

"He is very tall, and very powerful," answered Lord Francis, "taller than myself, much taller than Charles, yet graceful and active beyond any man I ever saw. He is under four-and-thirty years of age; but the long flowing beard and hair which he has worn uncut apparently for several years——"

"The same, the same!" cried Henrietta, with a glad smile. "Now I know all—see all. If you find him, my good lord, ask him to come hither. If not, at all events, send me the physician. I shall pass an anxious day till he comes."

She paused a moment, and then some new ideas seemed suddenly to strike her; and when she went on, in the eagerness of her emotion, she spoke partly as it were to Lord Francis—partly to herself. "Yes,—why not," she cried. "Surely, in such a case, and for such an object, I may be pardoned if, adhering to the letter, ay, and the spirit too, I deviate from the exact interpretation, without abandoning the object sought."

"I do not understand you, lady," replied the young nobleman; "it seems to me, that you propose to unite incompatible things."

"It matters not, my lord," she said; "I must act as I can best, and if I err in judgment, 't is with no wrong intent, and no evil shall follow. Pray, send me the physician, and that

as soon as may be. Farewell! a blessing be upon all your endeavours, for you were the first to speak truly, and wisely, and kindly to poor Henrietta Compton; and her thanks and gratitude will follow you to her dying day."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FROM the small lodging of Henrietta Compton, Lord Francis de Vipont, followed by two of his servants, hastened to pass the frowning gates of Newgate and several of the inns of court, till, turning to the right out of Holborn, he entered the gardens of a large and fine house, where now stand some of the smallest and most densely-populated streets, to the south of Bedford and Russell-square. His stay was not long, however, for his cousin, whom he sought, was not there, and none of the servants could give any information as to where he was to be found. Hurrying back again, the young nobleman made his way through the houses, and gardens, and streets mingled with trees, which were to be found at that time between Holborn and the Strand, and at length reached the open space or square before Southampton Place. The day was at this time fine and clear, the sky without a cloud, and yet the square had, to the eyes of Lord Francis, a somewhat solemn and gloomy look. There were few persons, indeed, to be seen; no shops, no taverns, no busy places of resort were there, and the principal objects were the high wall, large gates, and tall roof of Southampton Place.

The sun shone upon the solitary space between, and, as the young nobleman crossed towards the house of his friend, only one human figure met his eye. It was that of a man who walked up and down before the front entrance of the mansion, and ever and anon bent his eyes upon the doors as if waiting for some one to come forth. As Lord Francis approached, the man—who had for a moment directed his steps towards the Strand—turned in his walk, and displayed the features of the council messenger, by whom he had been mistaken for the merchant Holloway, and arrested on a preceding night. A grin of recognition passed over the officer's dull face, but the young nobleman did not seek to renew the acquaintance, and entered the gates.

On inquiring for Lord Russell, one of the servants who were in attendance in the vestibule led him to a library, where he found that nobleman calmly reading. But the sight of the council messenger, and the evident watchfulness which he displayed, had somewhat alarmed Francis de Vipont, and as soon as he had shaken hands with Lord Russell, and the door was shut, he said, "I do not know whether you are aware

my dear lord, that there is one of the king's messengers waiting before the house, and gazing from time to time at your gates, with a very suspicious look."

"Yes, my young friend, I am well aware of the fact," replied Lord Russell, "and more, Lord Francis, I am aware that a man of the name of Rumséy has, in a deposition made before the council, named me as guilty of some designs against the government. You know that a number of arrests have taken place, and this matter will not end without a good deal of bloodshed, depend upon it.—But what of your father?"

"It was about him I came to speak with your lordship," replied Lord Francis; "but, for Heaven's sake! think of yourself in the first instance, and provide for your own safety, if there be yet any means left."

"Oh, plenty of means, if I were willing to take them," said Lord Russell; "the front door is guarded, but that at the back of the house is still left free, and I am half-inclined to believe that this sort of petty watch has been set upon me, either as a friendly hint to escape till the storm has blown over, or as a trap to induce me to belie my own innocence, by an attempt to fly. I have asked my dear wife, however, to go out and consult our friends as to the best course to follow; and by their opinion I will be guided. I ventured to send your fair Gertrude, too, to the Duke of Ormond; to thank him, in the first place, for her father's pardon: and, in the next, to ask him for such information as his duty may permit him to give, concerning the charges against me."

"Then Sir William Ellerton is pardoned!" cried Lord Francis, joyfully; "that is the first good news I have heard for several days. Where is he to be found?"

"Nay, that no one knows," answered Lord Russell; "he escaped from Shepherd's house when that poor fellow was arrested, and does not even yet know that his pardon has passed the great seal. Gertrude had a letter from him yesterday, however, saying he was safe, but giving no address. Now to your father, however, what have you heard of him?"

"That a letter of a very dangerous tendency was certainly written by him to my cousin Charles," replied his young friend, "and that the letter is lost. Who has taken it, where it now rests, we know not; but it is gone, apparently beyond recall, and may perhaps be in an adversary's hands."

"That is serious, indeed!" exclaimed Lord Russell. "Doubtless, with the judges and juries we now have, a letter will be looked upon as an overt act, and may prove fatal. What does he intend to do?"

"I have not seen him since I discovered that the letter was irrecoverable," answered Lord Francis. "I had a hope of

finding a clue to the mystery, here in London ; but that has failed, and I came to consult you, not knowing your present painful position."

"Tell him to fly," said Lord Russell ; "his case is very different from mine. I may have talked of the means of resisting, even with arms, the progress of arbitrary power, but I have done no more ; and, except by the grossest perversion of the law of the land, they cannot injure me ; but that fatal letter, if it be found, may doom your father to destruction. I know he has been named in the deposition of a man called West, and if they can bring written evidence also against him, he is lost. Hasten back to him without delay, my young friend, and tell him, as the best counsel I can give, to fly."

"I have come to the same conclusion, myself," replied Lord Francis ; "but oh, my dear lord, were it not best to take your own counsel to your bosom, and go likewise, while it is yet time ? Remember how little justice has been seen in England of late years, that the famed trial by jury, once the certain safeguard of England, is now but a pretence ; that men carry their passions and their prejudices into the court where they sit to decide upon a fellow-creature's life or death ; and that even the expounder of the law is but too often the corrupt agent of party malevolence."

"All true, my friend," replied Lord Russell, "and I will be guided by the opinions of others, though my own is to stay, and not to give a colour to the implication of guilt by flight. I would not have my own acts condemn me, when I do believe that I have done nought that I was not justified in doing by the perilous state of my country ; nought that can be construed into treason, without a perversion of the law. But hark ! there is some one coming—Lady Russell, I trust, by whose intelligence I will be decided."

The door opened the moment after, but it was Gertrude who entered. There were lines of deep anxiety upon her countenance, so painful to see upon the face of youth. In middle age, in the decline of life, there is a harmony between care and man. it is the lichen upon the ruin ; we expect, we are not surprised or shocked to see it ; but upon the happy, happy face of early years, to see the marks of carking thought has something sadly dissonant to the preconceptions of the heart.

The anxiety did not leave her face, though it was somewhat brightened by the sight of her lover, and giving him her hand as she advanced, she went on to Lord Russell, saying, in a low voice, "The duke is gone back to Ireland, my lord, and I can gain no intelligence."

"It matters not much, my dear young lady," answered Lord Russell, in a tone perfectly calm; "I do not think he could or would have afforded much intelligence. But there are the carriage-wheels, we shall now hear what my friends think of this."

The next instant Lady Russell entered, and casting herself into his arms, she hung upon his breast with dread and breathless anxiety.

"What say they, Rachel?" he asked, after giving her a moment to recover.

"I must tell you the truth," answered Lady Russell, "one is of one opinion, another of another; but when I told them, as you bade me, that you had never said aught to this man Rumsey which could in any way compromise you, they declared that it would be better for you to stay, as your going might be construed into a confession of guilt."

"Then I will stay," replied Lord Russell. "Their opinion coincides with mine; and as to Rumsey, make your mind easy my dear wife, I have had too little confidence in him even to communicate my thoughts to him, much less my purposes. If he has told the truth, he has said nothing which can bring me within the peril of the law."

Even while he spoke, a servant opened the door, and coming in, exclaimed, with a look of apprehension, "Three or four men have come into the court, my lord!—one is Browning, a council messenger."

"Go and bring him hither," said Lord Russell; and turning round to his wife, he added, in a low voice, "Be firm, my love—be firm; and, above all, do not distress the children by showing your alarm."

A short interval took place, and then, as on an occasion of ceremony, the door was thrown open by two servants, and a messenger of the council—not the same who had been waiting before the gates—appeared. He was a man of a gentlemanly exterior and demeanor, and bowing low, with his feathered hat in his hand, he advanced till he was within a step or two of Lord Russell, and then said, without any outward sign of an arrest, "I am commanded by his Majesty, my lord, to request your presence before him, at the council now sitting at White Hall."

"I will attend his Majesty instantly," replied Lord Russell, with calm gravity. "My coach, I think, must be even now in the court-yard, and you will doubtless do me the honour of accompanying me therein."

The messenger bowed low in token of acquiescence, without reply; and Lord Russell ordered one of the servants who still stood at the door, to bring his hat, sword, and clo-

Then turning to Lady Russell, he spoke a few words to her, in a low voice, and taking her hand in his, pressed it with fond affection.

"Farewell, for the present, my love!" he said. "Farewell, Gertrude! Farewell, Lord Francis! Commend me kindly to your father, and remember to tell him what I said regarding the wild-duck shooting, and how the birds got out of the decoy."

"I will, my lord," replied the young nobleman, understanding his enigmatical words at once.

"Now, sir, I am ready," said Lord Russell to the messenger; and with one more token of love to his wife, and a murmured blessing upon the dear household he was leaving behind for ever, he walked with a firm step out of the room, followed by the messenger.

Lady Russell clasped her hands together, and for a moment or two gazed, with a fixed but tearless eye, upon the ground; then turning to Lord Francis, she said, "Oh, my dear lord, forgive an anxious, fearful wife. I would give one-half that I possess to have news of what takes place in that sad council-room. Would you go thither, and send me tidings, by a servant, from time to time?"

"I will, dear lady," answered Lord Francis; "but doubtless the council will be private, and I shall be able, I fear, to gain but little intelligence."

"Oh, you will read it in men's faces—you will hear it in their tones," said Lady Russell, eagerly; and placing her hand upon her brow, she added, in a low voice, "methinks the very stones would tell it, if there were evil meditated against such a man. But I am wrong, Lord Francis, you have other duties before you. Did I not hear my lord send a message to your father? There was meaning in those words; you had better convey them quickly."

"I will order horses to be brought to me to White Hall," replied Lord Francis; "and, by the time they come, I trust I shall be able to send you good news of Lord Russell."

After giving his directions in regard to procuring fresh horses, the young nobleman walked rapidly towards White Hall and found his friend's coach standing before one of the many doors of the building. The servants were standing round, and a number of boys were grouped about the archway, as if already aware that some matter of weal or woe was going on within.

A tall porter, with a staff in his hand, drove the urchins away in vain, for the moment he had retired into his den again, they once more gathered round the mouth thereof. As it was agreeable to the young gentleman to stand in the street

amongst the rabble, he applied to the big janitor for permission to wait a few minutes in his lodge, and a piece of money made him wonderfully compliant, not only to this request, but some others which Lord Francis whispered in his ear. When he had been there a few minutes, some one came down the stairs as if to pass out. Instantly, like a spider from the corner of his web, the porter darted forth upon him, spoke a few words, received a somewhat longer answer, and returning to Lord Francis, said, in a whisper, "All going on well, my lord. The Lord Russell defends himself stoutly, and will clear himself, the waiter thinks. They have sent for Colonel Rumsey's depositions to the council office."

The young nobleman heard the intelligence with a thoughtful air. It was satisfactory, as far as it went; but still he would not send it to Lady Russell, for he feared to raise hopes which might be too soon dispelled. In about five minutes, the man who had passed before, returned, and mounted the stairs, and then two or three people came up or down; but the porter took no notice of them. A short pause followed, and then a messenger came down from above. Instantly the young nobleman's companion ran out, and asked him a question. The messenger did not stop to reply, but turned his head, saying aloud, "To the Tower!" and going to the door, he ordered the coach to draw up close. The next moment there was the sound of several footsteps on the stairs, and, looking forth, Francis de Vipont saw Lord Russell descending, with an officer of the guard on one side, and a messenger on the other.

The first impulse of Lord Francis de Vipont was to start forward and speak to him, but he thought the moment after, "No! The thoughts of home and of happiness passed away, are busy enough at his heart already. I will not move them still more painfully;" and, drawing back, he let the sad party pass by. The unfortunate nobleman entered his own carriage, the order was given to drive to the Tower, and Lord Francis, after having rewarded the porter as he had promised, hurried away to convey the painful intelligence to Southampton Place. He found Lady Russell waiting anxiously, with the old Earl of Bedford, and the moment she beheld the face of Lord Francis, she exclaimed, "I see it, my lord. You need not speak—my husband is lost!"

"Nay, my dear lady," replied the young nobleman; "not so. He has been sent, it is true, to the Tower; but only preliminary to further investigation."

She shook her head sadly, and some tears fell from her eyes. "It is in vain, my lord," she said; "he goes, never to come forth again. He knows it, and I know it. We have no con-

fidence in the justice of the land. Nevertheless, I will yield to no womanly weakness. I am Russell's wife, and will show myself worthy of him. Everything must be done to insure him as fair a trial as may be. We must seek good counsel, my dear lord and father; and obtain, if possible, admission to our beloved prisoner.—Oh! the dear children, how their little hearts will ache!—A better father, husband, friend, Christian, citizen, has never lived.”

“There are times, dear daughter,” said the Earl of Bedford, “when virtues become offences. I fear it is so now.”

“Many, many thanks, my lord,” said Lady Russell, turning to Lord Francis. “I have kept you too long from weighty matters. Fare you well, and God speed you! I have a heavy time before me: may yours be lighter. You will find dear Gertrude with the children, if you wish to see her before you go.”

The young nobleman kissed her hand, and left her with her father-in-law. He could not make up his mind, indeed, to quit London without one more sight of her he loved; but he stayed not long, merely telling her that he would return to the capital to watch the progress of events, as soon as he had seen his father, and taken such measures of precaution as might be judged necessary. Then, bidding her adieu, he mounted one of the horses which had followed him from White Hall, and rode out as speedily as possible into the country.

Opposite to the sign of the Packhorse, Lord Francis de Vipont drew his rein, and springing to the ground, entered the house. “How goes it with your master?” he inquired, as one of Charles Maldon's servants met him in the passage.

“Very bad, my lord,” replied the man. “The doctor says he has got the fever, and this is a sad noisy place for a sick man.—I hope it is not the plague come back again.”

“Oh, no,” replied Lord Francis; “it is but the effect of fatigue and a mind depressed;” and turning away, he was walking up the stairs, when the man pulled his cloak, saying, in a low voice, “Mistress Compton is with him, sir.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Lord Francis, in some surprise. “I am glad to hear it;” and going on, he entered the room where he had left his cousin.

Seated by the sick man's bed-side, with a glass in his hand, was the physician who had been sent from London; and behind him, with calm and easy grace in the figure, but deep anxiety on the fair face, stood Henrietta Compton. Lord Francis advanced, and as he did so, touched her hand, saying, in a low voice, “This is very kind of you.”

She made no reply; but the sound of his voice called the

attention of the sick man, whose corporeal powers had been wonderfully prostrated in so short a space of time.

"Ah, Francis!" he said, "I am very ill. I would to Heaven I could be taken from this place! There has been noise enough in the road, and the court-yard, to drive a sick man mad."

The young nobleman turned an inquiring look to the physician, who answered it at once: "Yes, in this stage," he said, "there is no reason why in a litter he should not be moved a short distance. We should do so with a poor man. Why not with a rich one?"

"But how is it all to be arranged?" asked Lord Francis, turning his eyes to Henrietta; "I must go on upon my way immediately."

"Leave it all to me," said the lady, in her low sweet tones; "I will have it done."

"Thank you, Henrietta, thank you," said Charles Maldon; "you are a dear kind girl; but bend down your head for a moment, Francis—I wish to say a word to you."

The physician drew back, and, while Henrietta spoke with him for a few moments near the window, the sick man's cousin leaned over the bed, and listened.

"Where is the money for all this to come from?" he said, in a low tone; "you must order my horses, and all the rest of my effects, to be sold."

"Trouble not your mind with such things at present," answered Lord Francis; "as to these expenses, Charles, you must share my purse; but the arrangements I must leave to others, for I must ride back as fast as I can to give my father notice of all that is occurring in London. The letter is not to be recovered, Mistress Compton assures me, in a manner that leaves no doubt upon my mind, that she has not got it."

"That is unfortunate, indeed," replied Charles Maldon; but he instantly quitted the subject again. Sickness is almost always selfish; and he hardly gave a minute's thought to a subject which a few hours before had seemed all-important in his eyes; and he added, "Talk to Henrietta and the doctor about moving me hence."

"I will," said the young nobleman in reply; and, advancing to the window, he spoke for a moment or two to the lady.

"Leave it to me, my lord," she said; "I have already spoken to this worthy gentleman, and by his kind assistance will procure a litter, and have Lord Alcester removed at once. I know your lordship is anxious to depart; but as far as human tendance can soothe or restore him, you may go with a

mind at rest. I will not leave him till he is out of peril, and then immediately I must give up the task."

She laid some emphasis on the last words; and Lord Francis understood them rightly. He might doubt, perhaps, whether her resolution would hold, but he would not let any such thoughts interfere with her charity, and proceeded to a part of the subject perhaps as delicate. He spoke of the means of defraying the expenses of a sickness which might be long. He knew that his cousin had but little to spare, and was not aware whether his purse was well or ill filled, when he left that house which had lately been his home. He was therefore approaching the subject with as fair a veil over his kindly intentions as might be; when Henrietta stopped him, saying, "I am sure he would be grateful, my lord; but happily there is no occasion for assistance now. By fortunate circumstances, I am enabled to supply all that the occasion may require. Hereafter, he may need your kindness, and I am sure you will grant it to him to the utmost of your power."

"Doubt it not, dear lady," replied the young nobleman; "and now there is but one other question. Where shall I find him on my return, which will be ere long?"

"That I cannot exactly tell you," replied Henrietta; "for there are many things to be considered; but you will hear of him at my dwelling."

Few more words were spoken on either side; for though the demeanour of Henrietta was not exactly cold, yet a sense of her painful position gave a stiffness and formality to her manner, in speaking to Charles Maldon's cousin, which made him ask himself, "Can this be the gay, frank girl of other days?"

No more than a quarter of an hour elapsed during the visit of the young nobleman to his cousin, and then he spurred on again, as fast as his horses would carry him. They were fresh from the stables of a well-known dealer in London, and had been selected by the groom with care; so that their pace was good, and their promise of endurance great: but Lord Francis, though strong, active, and endowed with considerable powers of resisting fatigue, was weary and exhausted with long, almost incessant riding for the last three days, and want of food and sleep. As he approached Ford, about seven in the evening, he felt that some refreshment was absolutely necessary, and that even then it would be with difficulty that he could reach Ellerton that night. He rode, therefore, at once into the stable-yard; but what was his surprise on so doing to find himself surrounded by his father's servants, and to see before him the large coach in which the Earl was wont

to travel. "Is my father here?" he demanded eagerly, as he dismounted.

"Yes, my lord," replied the man whom he addressed, "his lordship is on his way to join you in London."

"And my sister?" demanded the young nobleman.

"The Lady Emmeline is within, my lord," said the host, bustling out to receive the new guest. "She saw you from the window."

In another moment Emmeline's hand was clasped in his, and his father, with a face grave and anxious, but from which much of the sternness had passed, met him with words of kindness and affection, such as the young nobleman had not heard for years. What touched Lord Francis more than all, however, was, that the Earl for a time forgot himself to think of him. "Francis, you look ill," he said; "worn, haggard, over-fatigued."

"'Tis nothing, 'tis nothing, my dear father," he replied; "a little too much hard riding, and little rest or food. Some meat and wine, and an hour or two's rest will make me quite well again; but now let us speak at once of more important matters;" and drawing the Earl into the window, he told him all that had happened.

"It is evident," he said, in conclusion, "that Henrietta Compton has not this letter, and never has seen it. Whether my cousin in his carelessness has put it in some secure place, and forgotten where, or whether it has fallen into the hands of some servant who has, perhaps, destroyed it, and certainly could not understand the import even if he could read it, I cannot tell; but it was the last advice of Lord Russell that you should fly till this storm has blown over."

The Earl was a good deal moved; his lip quivered and his eye thoughtfully sought the ground; but he answered at length, "No, I will not fly—at least not yet. I will pursue my course to London. Boldness may, perhaps, disarm suspicion. In London, too, there will be better means of leaving the country, should need be, than here at a distance from any large sea-port. If I were to try to reach one direct, and were to be arrested on the way, the very act would be construed into acknowledgment of guilt; whereas, by going to London to face all accusers, I shall gain a presumption in my own favour, and not, I think, diminish the chance of escape should it prove necessary."

The different sides of the question were discussed for some time; but it was finally agreed that the whole party should remain at Ford that night, and set out soon after daybreak for the capital.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THERE are some lines by Sir Walter Scott, in the introduction, I think, to one of the cantos of the "Lady of the Lake," which are never to be forgotten. To quote any part would be vain, for the whole introduction forms a separate poem, equalled in beauty by few in the language; but the poet therein paints and contrasts the effects of dawn in many places upon many persons, and under many different circumstances. Though not professing in anything to imitate that great good man, I must here, to a certain degree, follow his course, and give an account of the state and condition of several of the different personages of this tale at the dawn of day on the 27th of June, 1683, the morning after the arrest of Lord Russell.

Clear and bright, the sky was only flecked here and there with thin clouds, like the mottled feathers on a bird's breast; but the early ray, which touched them with pale pink, poured through the narrow streets of the city in which the smoke of the preceding day still lingered with a dim yellow light. Amidst the agitated ocean of human beings, whose hearts are the waves of the great sea of life, the dawn in many instances came to herald pain and grief, labour and anxiety. But it found the eyes of Lady Russell awake and watchful; nor had they been closed during the whole night. By her side, in the library of that home so lately the abode of peace and joy, sat a man of a mild but energetic countenance, in a clerical habit, whom she called by the name of Tillotson. On the opposite side of the table, with books and papers before them, appeared two keen and sagacious-looking men, who from time to time cited some sage maxim of law, or read and commented upon one of the statutes in a book that lay open between them. A paper had just been written, in which were put down all the points of Lord Russell's case, as far as they were then known, and the laws affecting them; and after it had been read aloud, Lady Russell demanded, "Then, is it your opinion, gentlemen, that if, as I have said, this pretended conspiracy for an insurrection was merely talk, and proceeded to no act towards rebellion, the statute will not touch my lord?"

"Undoubtedly, madam, such is the law of the land," replied one of the lawyers; "some overt act must be proved by the unimpeachable testimony of two witnesses; this is clearly laid down by a statute of the twenty-fifth of Edward the Third and by that of Queen Mary. It has been held, indeed, and was acted upon in the case of Lord Stafford, that

the two witnesses are not to be required to prove the same overt act, but that proving two separate overt acts of the same treason is within the intent and meaning of the law. It is to be regretted that this interpretation has been admitted, as loose interpretations are always most dangerous, especially in regard to capital offences."

"But still some overt act is necessary," rejoined Lady Russell, "to bring the case within the statutes against high treason—is it not so?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the lawyer.

"Then I am satisfied," said the lady, sinking back in her chair with a look of exhaustion; "for I am sure there has been none committed.—It was all talk.—I shall sleep now."

"Indeed, you need it, dear lady," said Tillotson; "and we had better take our leave."

"Do not forget, then, my reverend friend," said Lady Russell, rising, "all that you have so kindly undertaken. Surely they will not refuse a wife the right to see and comfort her husband."

"I trust not," answered Tillotson; "but yet we must not be too sanguine, for uncontrolled power is only safe in the hand of Omniscience. Yet I do not think the King is a harsh man, although more inexorable than many people imagine. I too will go and lie down for a while, and then, as soon as the doors are opened at White Hall, I will proceed at once to see what can be done."

"Thanks, many thanks to all of you, gentlemen," said the lady, and retired to rest.

The same morning light which found Lady Russell thus busily employed seeking her husband's justification, shone into a small room on the second floor of a house not far from Lombard-street, where two persons were seated at table, with a small lamp between them, some viands, and a flask of wine. The rays of the rising morning, though softened in their brightness by the dim and heavy atmosphere of the city, still contrasted almost painfully with the coarse yellow glare of the lamp, and made the features of Sir William Ellerton look more care-worn than they really were. Nevertheless, there was no little anxiety in his countenance; and as the clocks of the neighbouring churches struck the hour of three, he said to his companion, Dick Myrtle, with a look of hesitation, "Even now, my good friend, notwithstanding all the trouble you have taken and the generous kindness you have shown, I doubt whether I ought to go."

"You are to judge, Sir William," said Dick; "my only object was to provide you the means, if it pleased you to take advantage of them. I owe you that, and a great deal more,

Sir William. But what is it that makes you doubt? It is a bad thing to doubt, and seldom does good in any case. I have seen a hen run over by a broad-wheeled waggon, because she doubted which side of the road she would go."

"The news you brought me yourself last night, Richard, makes me doubt," replied Sir William Ellerton. "It is, in truth, very unfortunate that you could not see Gertrude either yesterday or the night before; but it is not parental fondness alone which makes me hesitate. I doubt that I am doing my duty, in leaving her unprotected here, when the arrest of Lord Russell, and the charges against him, must leave his own fate and the condition of his family unsettled and precarious."

"If Lady Russell is what I have always heard," answered Dick Myrtle, "she will take good care of Mistress Gertrude, I am quite sure."

"Of that I have no doubt, if she have the means," replied Gertrude's father; "but no one can tell in these days, how far persecution may be carried. Remember to what a terrible length the consequences of high treason extend in regard to the family of the criminal. Lady Russell herself may need a home, instead of being able to afford it to another. Besides; my good friend, I am not half satisfied as to the nature of the intimation we have received. It was dark and mysterious, and might be intended to mislead rather than to guide."

"Of one thing you cannot doubt," answered Dick Myrtle, "that your pardon has not been obtained; and as to the hint to fly, I think it was given by one very well acquainted with what is taking place. The gentleman himself I never saw before, and only know that he was a good-looking man, seemingly exceedingly sick and weak; for he was as white as my shirt, and was leaning heavily against the door-post of the house when I came out, after talking to Shepherd's maid. He must have known me too, for he spoke to me directly, and told me to advise Master Fenwick to get beyond sea again as fast as possible. Then, too, the man who was with him—or who was standing near, at all events—was, I am quite sure, a servant of Lord Howard of Escrick's, and every one says that he is a comrade of my Lord Russell's in this plot. My belief is, that the gentleman came from Southampton Place. But, however that may be, there is no time for much consideration. The tide, they told me, would serve at four, and in five minutes after, the ship will be dropping down the river."

Sir William Ellerton mused for an instant, and then shaking his head, he said, "Not likely, I think, that he came from

Southampton Place. Lord Russell was then at liberty. Gertrude would have come herself and not trusted such a message to a stranger—but there is some one knocking at the door below, I think.”

“The man for the baggage,” said Dick Myrtle; “I will go down and let him in.”

A minute or two after, steps were heard coming up stairs, and Dick Myrtle re-entered the room with a man roughly clad in the dress of a sailor of those days, but not that of the lowest class.

“That is the gentleman who is going,” said Dick Myrtle, pointing to Sir William Ellerton, “as you wish to speak with him yourself; but make haste, for there is no time to be lost, I suppose.”

“That depends upon a thing or two,” answered the sailor; and then turning to Sir William Ellerton, he proceeded, “You see, sir, the case is this; our master has sent me up to tell you, that if you are one of those who have been proclaimed, you had better stay where you are; for we have found out that every ship which goes down the river is to be overhauled three times, and searched from stem to stern, once here, once at Gravesend, and once at the river’s mouth; so that there is no hope of getting any one over quietly. You must do as you like, but the master says you had better not come if you are not quite sure; and he had a great deal rather you did not, for the ship might be detained Heaven knows how long, if any of these gentry were found on board! He has sent you back the money, if you would like to stay.”

“This decides the question, Richard,” said Sir William Ellerton, looking up to Dick Myrtle; “I will not go.”

“Then here is the money,” said the man; “it is a pretty lot of stuff to part with, but better that than be seized;” and he laid down a bag upon the table.

At the same hour, and by the same faint light of morning, a servant passed along a small but well-arranged and beautifully-furnished suite of apartments, and entering one of the further rooms drew quietly back the curtains of a large brocade bed.

“It is three o’clock, Sir Frederick,” he said, “and the sun is up.”

“Have the men gone down to the river side?” demanded Sir Frederick Beltingham, in a faint and feeble tone.

“Yes, sir, they have been gone nearly an hour,” replied his valet Beacher; “but I think you had better not get up, sir, you seem so weak.”

“Yes I will,” replied Sir Frederick Beltingham, “I told Lord Howard to be here at four—see that you have break-

ready ;" and he proceeded to dress himself. Twice during that operation, however, he had recourse to a small bottle of cordial drops, which seemed to revive him for the time, though the effect lasted not long. His toilet occupied nearly an hour ; and though when he first rose, nothing could be more haggard than his appearance, yet when his wound had been dressed, and he himself had been tricked out with all the superfluous ornaments of the day, selected from heaps of ribbons, and silks, and velvets, and laced cravats, with the beard close shaved, and a slight touch of rouge delicately spread upon the cheek, to take away from the intense paleness of the bloodless face, there did not appear so much difference between the Sir Frederick Beltingham of that morning and him of a fortnight before.

"Now, quick ! see for breakfast," he said, as soon as all was complete ; "I am never half alive till I have had it. I shall not wait for Lord Howard."

"I hear him coming up, sir," repeated the man ; and, by the time the knight had reached the adjoining room, his worthy comrade was entering the one beyond.

The expression of Lord Howard's face was but slightly different from that which it usually bore. It had always been of a bitter cynical cast, and it was so still. He had always had an averted wandering glance, and that was not absent now. But still there was a little difference, which, to so marking an eye as that of Sir Frederick Beltingham, showed that all within was less at ease than usual.

"Well, Beltingham," he said, "what is the matter now, that you rouse me at such unseasonable hours ? I could hardly believe my senses when I received your message ; and as, in the surprise of the moment, I had accepted, I went to bed at nine to be up in time. I should have thought after such copious blood-letting, as you have lately had, it seems, you would have been sonder of your bed."

"Oh blood-letting does no harm in spring," said Beltingham ; "especially when we calculate upon bleeding the surgeon in turn. But I asked you to breakfast at this hour to talk over all our friends."

"We might do that by daylight as well as by twilight," answered Lord Howard ; "but as it is your whim, and we are here, what news of all our friends ? Do you know anything of them ? Mine are principally in the Tower, or in Newgate, thank Heaven !"

"Oh, yes, I know all about every one," replied Beltingham ; "it is the only thing worth knowing ; for the follies of our friends are the only amusement left us. You know what has become of Alcester ?"

"Not I," said Lord Howard, with an indifferent air; "he is entertaining himself, I suppose, with the blue-eyed cottage maid, and diversifying love by setting the gay coquette of the village and that stern recluse of his, Henrietta Compton, by the ears together."

"Nothing of the kind," answered Beltingham; "he is lying ill of a fever at a road-side inn, called the Packhorse, near Islington. He caught this sickness by riding to and fro between Malwood and London half-a-dozen times, without rest or food, I believe. He had business of fearful moment in hand it would seem, and I could not help thinking your lordship must know something of it."

Lord Howard shied away from the subject like a skittish horse. "I never heard he was ill till this moment, upon my life and honour!" he replied; and he was not a little glad that the entrance of the servants with the morning meal, interrupted the conversation for a few minutes. Sir Frederick did not give him any long repose, however, asking the moment after, "Do you know the Earl of Virepont, my good lord?"

"But slightly," replied Lord Howard; "we do bow when we meet, but that is all."

"Droll!" said Beltingham, dryly. Lord Howard made no answer, but bit his lip, and proceeded with his breakfast in silence, till the servants had quitted the room, then, turning to his host, he said, in a sharp and bitter tone, "What is all this, Beltingham? You are aiming at something, let me hear what it is."

Beltingham mused for a moment with his cold unpleasant look, and then replied, "I am aiming at something, my good lord, and as I need your help, I think I must trust you, especially as I can make it your interest, I think, to go with me in this matter."

"Oh! no plots or conspiracies for me," cried the other; "they are dangerous matters, I will have nought to do with them."

"I know your great abhorrence of all such things," replied Beltingham, with a sneer upon his lip; "you have avoided them all your life, and more particularly within the last twelve months. However, this is a private matter. You must know I am about to reform and get married."

"I give you joy!" exclaimed Howard, with a laugh; "we will drink your health to-night at the Salutation; but what have I to do with your matrimonial freak, my good friend?"

"Listen, and you shall hear," said Beltingham; "you know Sir William Ellerton, I think."

"I did know him," answered Lord Howard; "but where he is, or what he is doing, I am ignorant. People said that

old Virepont cut his throat, and buried him in a corner of his own park ; but that is not true."

"Entirely fabulous," replied the other ; "but you may have heard that I once had a certain sort of liking for his daughter."

"Yes, I remember. He kicked you out of his house," said Lord Howard.

"I have forgiven him," answered Beltingham. "Like the pope, I have made him perform penance, and now grant him absolution. I intend to marry his daughter, and make her an excellent husband."

"The devil you do !" exclaimed his noble companion : "why, Beltingham, my friend, I thought you were as poor as a starved rat, or as myself, and that you would think of no less a fortune than a royal mistress, or the daughter of a rich cheesemonger."

"I am, I think, tolerably well to do," replied the knight, looking complacently at his rich furniture ; "but, nevertheless, a large fortune will not come amiss. Now, I know that you are poor. Pray, is the Salisbury estate mortgaged ?"

"To the window-sills," answered Lord Howard, with a laugh.

"Then a sum of ten thousand pounds would not come amiss," said Beltingham ; "now, my good lord, I have only to say, that if, with your aid and assistance, I am enabled to marry Gertrude Ellerton, you shall have my hand for the money out of her portion."

"In Heaven's name ! where is her portion to come from ?" asked Lord Howard, with an unpleasant smile ; "her father an outlaw beyond sea, his estates cleverly conveyed by grant of the Crown to his most disinterested cousin of Virepont, his lady living upon a beggarly pension from the Court of France, and the young lady herself——"

"No other than the blue-eyed maid of the cottage," replied Beltingham, interrupting him ; "but, nevertheless, no less heiress to the whole Ellerton estates of full fifteen thousand sterling pounds per annum."

"Impossible !" exclaimed Lord Howard ; "why, the Earl has been in possession full three years."

"He has," answered Beltingham ; "but he was in possession too soon, and there lies the fault. This lord is an impetuous man. He hurried all things forward far too fast. There are no less than three fatal flaws in the grant, and it gives him no more title than a sheet of white paper. First, it states Sir William Ellerton to be an outlaw, who has not come in within the twelve months to take his trial according

to due form of law, and the grant is dated but eleven months after the proclamation; next, it states that there is no heir of entail, now the estate is strictly entailed both in the male and female line; and lastly, the whole estate is wrongly described. Besides, I have a strong suspicion that, before Sir William fled, he executed a formal transfer of the whole estate to his daughter out of kindred love and affection. Thus, then, my good lord, the blue-eyed maid of the cottage is a great heiress, and well worth the attentions of so humble an individual as your most obedient servant."

"But the question is, whether those attentions will be very acceptable," rejoined Lord Howard; "of that I may have my doubts, Beltingham."

"Not more potent ones than mine, my dear lord," replied the knight; "and it is to render my intentions acceptable, I would fain request your assistance."

"What, I am to be the mediator!" cried Lord Howard. "Good faith! but methinks if I were unwived, I would plead my own cause."

"No one I know would do so more readily, if not more successfully," replied Beltingham, with one of his bitter sneers: "but you might find difficulties in your way which you did not calculate upon. First, you know not where she is; and secondly, you have no hold upon her, while I have. Thus stands the affair. The lady is in London, anxiously seeking for her father's pardon, moving even political enemies to seek it. Let me proceed—and take some more of that chocolate, the only good thing that ever came out of Portugal.—Her father is in England—in my hands—in my power. My staunch beagle Beacher has tracked him out from place to place, leaving me nought to do but put him on the scent. However, I say he is now in my hands—his life at my disposal."

"Not quite," said Lord Howard; "he may easily get pardoned, you know; and the Tory star is in the ascendant."

"Well, we will suppose it is as I say," rejoined Sir Frederick Beltingham. "I, like all gay young men, was rash. I tried the game which I am now going to play over again, when I had not such good cards in my hand, and lost. Now I will win by all that I hold dear. I have my hold upon him: he is by this time as close a prisoner in my hands as if he were in Newgate. Methinks I can so gather horrors round him, that he will not refuse to give his daughter's hand to me, to save his own life; and your part must be, my dear lord, if you will befriend me, and love ten thousand pounds, to take a letter from him to his daughter, beseeching her to give her fair hand to the man who has her father's existence at his

disposal, and using all those arguments which your fancy may suggest."

"You will hardly persuade her that such is the case," answered Lord Howard, dryly, "nor him either."

"Why not?" demanded Beltingham, fiercely. "You think he will trust to royal clemency and justice, and such idle stuff. He knows right well, that, at this Court of England, human life is set every day upon a die. The favour of a mistress—an old grudge—a wealthy and powerful enemy—a popular outcry turns the scale; and I can show that by the very precautions he has taken, by the very oversights which others have committed, the whole interests of the Earl of Virepont are engaged to bar the way between him and pardon. Will you do it, Escrick?"

Lord Howard burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, and, after taking breath, replied, "No, Beltingham, I will not. Now, I will tell you why. Because your whole scheme is vain. Her father's pardon passed the great seal three days ago. I would have told you so before, if you had not interrupted me.—Nay, do not look so utterly undone! Even Beltinghams will reckon their game before it is won;" and again he burst into a fit of laughter.

For a cunning man and a vain man to expose his whole schemes, only to find that they are as idle as the empty air; for a proud man to be made the laughing-stock of one whom he despised, was not to be borne. Sir Frederick Beltingham ground his teeth. "Hark ye, Lord Howard of Escrick," he said, "keep your laughter for the court, where you will soon be tried; or the scaffold, where you will soon be executed. Do not suppose you are so shrewd as to have escaped suspicion, or so good a judge of men as to have chosen those who will not betray you. I tell you, all you have done is as well known to the Court, as if they had been watching you with a perspective glass. Your whole plot is discovered from the beginning to the end, and you will grin more constantly when your head is on a pole."

"A plot!" cried Lord Howard, growing grave instantly. "I take God to witness, I know of no plot in the world. You are talking at random, Beltingham, because the Court has chosen to arrest half a dozen people upon an imaginary conspiracy, in order to frighten one party and raise the enthusiasm of another."

"Of the half dozen arrested," replied Sir Frederick Beltingham, "not one will escape the axe, most noble lord, as you will soon see; and though your neck be none of the thinnest, I rather suspect that it will find great difficulty in keeping your head in conjunction with your shoulders."

"Then my head must take care of itself," answered Howard; "but I take Heaven to witness, and may all curses pursue me, if I know of any plot on earth!"

"Your head, my noble lord, has not proved a very good one as yet," said Sir Frederick Beltingham, "or it would have prevented you from going down and communicating all your plans to such a blabbing boy as Alcester. Do you suppose that I am unaware of any particular?"

Lord Howard kept silence for a moment or two, and only broke it to give vent to fresh assertions—confirmed by many a blasphemous imprecation—that there was no plot within his cognizance.

Sir Frederick Beltingham laughed low and bitterly, and replied, "Take my advice, my lord; see that your head not only takes care of itself, but of the rest of your body. You have not been so long intimate with Colonel Sydney for nothing; and the vengeance that has been hanging over his head will reach you too, as you will find in a few days to your cost. You know whether Sydney's life is more valuable to you than your own, and you can act accordingly."

"I do not understand what you mean," said Lord Howard, with a degree of agitation he could not conceal. "Speak plain, Beltingham, speak plain, if you would have me benefit by your advice."

"I know not how to speak plainer," answered Sir Frederick Beltingham; "you know well there is but one means of meriting the favour of a Court when one has lost it—one means of atoning for rebellion when it can be clearly proved,—submission—plain confession. I don't wish to give you advice of any kind; you must see by your own light. All I know is, that if I, like a fool, had been betrayed into any intrigues against the Government, by ill-designing and disaffected men, and found that they were arrested, and I myself in danger, my first care should be of my own skin; and I should let those who misled me shift for themselves."

Lord Howard leaned his head upon his hand and mused. The advice he received was by no means unpalatable to him. Without principle, without honour, corrupt in morals, nearly ruined in fortune, without attachments, gratitude, sincerity, or affection, there were few impediments to his pursuing the course suggested, except a repugnance to speaking the truth, and a timid hesitation in regard to increasing the dangers of his own situation by acknowledging his offences. Such is just the man, when he finds he can no longer escape, to endeavour to enhance the value of his confessions, by transcending the truth in his testimony against others. It is rendered perfectly clear, by the statements of all the prisoners.

and the informers also—if there be any truth at all in the story of the Rye-house Plot—that Lord Howard of Escrick was more guilty than any of those who suffered; that he was cognisant of, and a party to, the design of murdering the King and the Duke of York; that he in no degree opposed the adoption of the most atrocious means for accomplishing the object in view; and there is, moreover, every reason to believe that, in his testimony at the trials, he purchased his own safety by perjury against the prisoners. He affected, indeed, a reluctance, to compromise persons he called his friends, though they had long before repudiated the name, and nearly banished him from their society; and this assumed unwillingness has even imposed upon very acute historians. But any one who reads his narrative, as delivered to the Council and published by authority, will perceive the consummate art and cunning with which he endeavours to soften the odious features of his treachery. The whole composition lies under the suspicion of falsehood from the very opposite impression which it, taken by itself, would give of the character of the man, to that which is afforded by the concurrent testimony of all contemporaries. It shows him humble and gentle; whereas he is known to have been harsh, bitter, and arrogant. There is an affectation of candour and clear sincerity, when so double and so false was his character, that the King himself declared he would not hang the worst dog he had upon his evidence.

The words of Sir Frederick Beltingham suggested to him a course of conduct, through all the details of which his mind ran with great rapidity. To give himself up, to disclose all he knew, to betray the secrets which had been confided to him, and to bring those who had unwillingly associated with him to death for his own security, was the first project; but then, when he recollected that the great men, whom it was evident that the Court desired to strike, had never committed anything within his knowledge which could put them in danger of high treason, and that he himself, besides taking part in their consultations, had participated in all the criminal designs of inferior persons, with regard to whose treason there could be no doubt, he saw more danger than safety in the project, and hesitated at the act, not from its baseness, but its peril. A little further consideration showed his cunning mind that some economy of character, without any greater risk, would ensue from running his chance of being arrested and making his confession afterwards. Less obnoxious to the Court than Russell, Sydney, or Hampden, by reason of his political insignificance and his moral degradation, he thought it more likely that he could obtain pardon for his

offences when the crown lawyers had discovered that their case against more eminent persons would fail unless supported by his evidence, than at a moment when the first impression of a plot was strong, and excited imagination made men believe that proof would be easy. Nevertheless, he shrank from the very thought of the dangers, on every side, and was anxious, if possible, to escape without running any further risk.

While he thus meditated, the servant, Beacher, entered the room, and spoke for several minutes to Sir Frederick Beltingham, who seemed considerably irritated by the tidings he heard. His face worked, his lips became pale, his hand clasped the table-cloth, and he muttered twice, loud enough to be heard, "Can he have escaped me?"

Lord Howard could not resist his bitter spirit, even at a moment when he was moved by anxious apprehensions for himself, and he replied aloud, "What signifies, Beltingham, whether he has escaped you, when his estate has certainly slipped through your fingers?"

Beltingham was instantly himself again. "Your lordship is kind," he said, "to remind me of the fact. Leave us, Beacher; it matters not. What were we talking of, Escrick? Oh, your probable execution. I am going to see the king to-day, and lay my humble homage at his feet. Shall I tell him anything for you?—how gay you are? and how glad you will be to serve his Majesty if he will grant you a free pardon and a fair pension?"

"No, I think not," replied Howard, in a sneering tone; "he would not believe you; your character and mine are too well known."

"And yet," continued Beltingham, "I think he would not scruple to give both pardon and pension to any one whose testimony would bring Sydney's head to the block."

"Why Sydney's more than Russell's?" asked Lord Howard.

"Both were better than either," answered his companion; "but Sydney's best, because, in the degrees of comparison he is the worse. The king hates Sunderland much, because he is an exclusionist; he hates Russell more, because he is a limited monarchy man; he hates Sydney most, because he is a republican. He who slanders the one will please him well; he who informs against the other will please him better; he who convicts the third will please him best."

"But, unfortunately, I can do neither one nor the other," said Howard, with an indifferent air; "as I know nothing, so can I tell nothing."

"That is unfortunate," answered Beltingham; "but

whither away now, my good lord? Are you looking for your gloves? There they lie."

"I am away to Tolibury," replied Howard; "methinks the country will be quieter than the town. Good-day, Beltingham; I shall not come in again for a month."

"Good-day, then; and the peace and quiet of a country squire attend you," said Beltingham; but the moment he was gone he added, with a sneer, the simple word "Tolibury!" and that night Sir Leoline Jenkins received a note, informing him that the Lord Howard of Escrick was to be found at his house at Knightsbridge.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE hour was somewhat late of the evening, and the day had been cloudy and dark, when a hackney coach stopped opposite the gates of the Tower of London. In ten minutes more those gates would have been closed for the night; but they had not yet shut out the world from the lone hearts of the prisoners. Out of the coach got a young woman, plainly dressed in the garb of an ordinary female servant, with a large and apparently heavy basket on her arm, and walking through the outer gates she passed the drawbridge and the sutler's house, and then paused and looked about her. No one had offered to stop or speak to her hitherto; but now, seeing her look strange, as if she knew not where to turn, one of the stout warders walked up, and asked her in no unkindly tone, "Who or what are you looking for, my pretty girl?"

Well, indeed, might he call her so, for a prettier face or figure could hardly be seen. The girl immediately replied, "I am looking for my Lord Russell's servant, sir. The cook has sent these things, which he knows my lord likes for supper. Can you tell me where I can find Master Taunton?"

"I will give him the basket, my pretty maid," said the warder; "let me have it, and I will take care of it."

"No, no, that will not do," replied the girl, in a gay tone; "cook told me to give it into no hands but Master Taunton's own."

"And why so?" demanded her companion; "there must have been some reason."

"Ay, so there was," answered the girl; "he said if I gave it to any one but him, the stout warders would eat it all up themselves, for they know a good thing better than these lords."

The warder laughed loud, but replied, "Well, come along sweet one, I will show you your way; but you may not get in so easily as you fancy, for if they have locked the doors,

Master Taunton is most like locked in with his lord, and won't be out till the morning."

"Oh, dear, that is a pity," said the girl, "the things will all be spoiled. I will knock at his door till he opens it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried the warder, "that is good. If every one of his fingers was a key, he could not open it; but if we make haste we shall be in time;" and hurrying on, they passed through several courts and passages, and then entering the interior of the building, mounted a handsome flight of steps. As they reached the top, where a passage presented itself, they heard steps, and people talking, and in the faint light saw two figures advancing towards them. "The deputy and a turnkey," said the warder, in a low tone; "I must ask his leave for you."

The man in front had a mild and gentleman-like exterior, and was handsomely dressed, while the person who followed, carrying a large bundle of heavy keys in his hand, was a short, stout, repulsive-looking fellow, with a bowed knee, and somewhat of a limp in his gait.

"If you please, sir," said the warder, "here is the Lord Russell's kitchen maid, who has been sent by the cook with some things she is to give into his servant's own hands. May she have admission?"

"Certainly," replied the deputy, eyeing the girl, "the order was to let him have the benefit of his servant;" and then he added, with a laugh, "it did not say male or female."

"But the door's locked, sir," said the man behind.

"That does not matter," replied the deputy. "It is but a step to open it again; and it is a little before the hour. Look and see what is in the basket, warder. No papers must pass before my lord has been examined again. There, take it to that window."

The warder took the basket from the girl's unresisting hand, and carried it to the light, while she, in a low, sweet tongue, informed the deputy that it contained two cold fowls, a stump pie, some crystal jelly, and salad stuff.

"Very well, my good girl," replied the officer, "we will soon see; but for my part, if I were to choose a pretty chicken, it would be the one outside of the basket instead of either of those within."

As he spoke, the warder, who had been carefully looking over the contents, said, "It is all right, sir; nothing but provender; and I wish my lord would ask me to supper."

"There, Missal, go on with her and open the door," said the deputy, speaking to the turnkey; "but you must not stay, pretty face."

"Only till I've got my basket back," replied the girl.

"How long have you been in the Lord Russell's household?" inquired the deputy, as if willing to prolong the conversation.

"Just a fortnight come Friday," was the answer.

"Would you like to come and live in the Tower?" he asked again.

"Not for all the world!" cried the girl, with a shudder; and the deputy laughing, walked on, telling the warder to come with him.

The turnkey looked at the girl, and grumbled something about people giving so much trouble; but he did not venture to disobey his orders, and limped on to a door at the end of the passage, where he drew one heavy bolt, and after some clattering of keys turned the lock. "Here, Mr. Taunton," he said, putting in his head, "here's a young woman brought something for my lord's supper."

As he held the door open, the girl walked in, and found herself in a small ante-room, containing a truckle bed and a chair, and a lamp already lighted. Taunton, Lord Russell's servant, was seated near the small window looking west; but the moment the door opened he rose, and gazed hard at the unexpected visitor.

"Here, Mr. Taunton," said the girl, "the cook has sent these things to my lord. There are two fowls, a stump pie, some crystal jelly, and some salad stuff. Will you take them out, and let me have the basket? I am sure I am tired to death carrying it with them in."

"Why, I have got no dishes, my dear," said Taunton, advancing, and taking the basket from her.

"There, there," cried the turnkey, "leave the basket and all."

"That I won't," answered the girl; "I must have my basket back, I won't go without it."

"I'll tell you what, Master Missal," said Taunton, "you'd do me a very great favour if you'd just send a boy down to get some plates, and dishes, and knives, and forks. You know my lord can't eat off a bare board, and with his fingers. I'll give half a crown for the trouble."

"There's no boy to send," replied the turnkey, mollified by the name of a half-crown; "but I'll go myself. I would do anything in reason for the good lord; but the door must be locked, and she must wait till I come back."

"Oh, very well," said Taunton, gaily; "it is not the first time Betty and I have spent half an hour together, and I don't object, if she does not."

"Oh, no, Master Taunton," answered the girl; but, without waiting to hear further, the turnkey closed the door and

locked it. Taunton sprang toward it, and put his ear to the keyhole; but the turnkey's heavy stumping step was heard as he retired, and Gertrude Ellerton laying her hand upon the man's arm, said, in a low tone, "Quick, Master Taunton, open the basket. There is a note for your lord, concealed in one of those fowls. Give it him, and see if there be any message in return."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, madam," said the man, "for speaking to you so disrespectfully just now; but——"

"You were quite right," answered Gertrude; "but look for the note, and take it to your lord."

"Here it is!" exclaimed Taunton, after a moment's examination. "Oh, madam, this is very kind of you to my noble master."

"Quick, quick," cried Gertrude, "take it to him. Has he a light?"

"Oh, yes," replied the servant, and hurried away, while Gertrude sank into the chair, and rested her head upon her hand, overpowered with agitation. She heard a few words spoken in the next room, and then a short pause. The moment after, the door of the inner chamber opened again, and Lord Russell came out with a quick step.

"Ah, Gertrude, my dear child, this is very kind of you," he said, much moved, "too kind, too kind. You might expose yourself to great discomfort. Tell the best and dearest wife in the world, that I am well and quite composed; equal to anything that may occur. Her presence, when she can obtain permission, will be of infinite comfort to me; indeed, the greatest after God's grace. Bless her for me, and also my dear children. Then tell her, as to the postscriptum of her note, to send to the noble gentleman she wots of, and say to his Grace, that although I thank him much, and am much bound to him, yet if I needs must die, it would be no comfort to have my friends die with me."*

"I will not forget a word, my dear, kind friend," said Gertrude; "neither let my coming, should need be, once more, disquiet you. I have met nothing but courtesy."

"It must not be, Gertrude, it must not be," said Lord Russell, in a decided tone; "although I much wish to speak to you for a few minutes."

"He will not be back for a full quarter of an hour, my lord," said Taunton. "I will listen at the keyhole, and catch his steps when he comes up the stairs."

"Well, then, dear Gertrude," continued Lord Russell, "let me tell you now how grieved I am to be prevented

* This was said in answer to a question from the Duke of Monmouth, offering to give himself up.

from moving in your father's affairs, by this unfortunate arrest."

"But he is secured, my lord, by the king's pardon," answered Gertrude.

"Not upon the point I mean," replied Lord Russell; "he must have back the estate, and your marriage must have no obstacle. Had I remained at liberty two days longer, I could have insured it. If I am ever at liberty again, I will do so. I have the means, my dear, and will use them if God gives me deliverance; but of that I have many doubts. His will be done!"

"Oh, my lord, disquiet yourself not on my affairs," replied the young lady. "If I could find means of communicating to my father the news of his pardon, I should be content. I have already written to my mother, thinking she may learn where he is sooner than myself."

"Men must have many things, for this earth's use, besides a pardon, Gertrude," replied Lord Russell; "but I trust, the Earl will do justice without compulsion, and give consent to your marriage with good-will and kindness."

Gertrude shook her head with a grave look, but made no reply; and Lord Russell went on to say, "Your father, remember, my dear young friend, is somewhat prejudiced against him. I think, I believe he is an honourable man, though somewhat hard. However that may be, if I live, he shall do justice. If I die, alas! I cannot aid you."

"I hear his foot upon the stairs, my lord," said Taunton: "he has come back very soon."

"Adieu! Gertrude," said Lord Russell, pressing her hand in his own; "comfort my beloved wife, and do not leave her till all is over; remember my message. Farewell! dear child;" and passing through the door, he closed it quietly behind him.

Taunton instantly applied himself to take the various things out of the basket and place them on the table, but he had not yet concluded, when the turnkey opened the door, and gave a sharp look round. His eyes rested for a moment or two upon Gertrude's face, now fully displayed by the light of the lamp, but he made no observation at the moment, and setting down the plates and dishes which he carried, on the table, he aided Lord Russell's servant to empty the basket of its contents. When that was done, and he had received the half-crown promised him, he turned to Gertrude, saying, "Now, come along, ma'am. We must get the place clear." Gertrude took the basket from Taunton's hands, bade him good-by in an ordinary tone, and followed the jailer out. He locked the door carefully, bolted it, and limped along the passage for

a step or two, by the young lady's side in silence. Then, however, stopping short, he said,—

"I will tell you what, you are no kitchen-maid, and if it wer'n't that you are so young, I should say, you were my Lady Russell herself; but it is no fault of mine, if anybody is to be blamed for it."

"You would be quite mistaken in thinking me Lady Russell," replied Gertrude.

"Well, well! returned the turnkey, "you are not what you pretend to be, at all events."

"I never said I was anything but what I am," replied the young lady, remembering that it was the warder who had given her the appellation of kitchen-maid; "but, pray, show me my way out of this place, for I am anxious to get home."

"I do not know that I shall," answered the turnkey, hesitating, and after a momentary pause, full of anxiety to poor Gertrude, he added: "Well, come along: it would only make confusion, and there is no need of noticing all one sees."

Thus saying, he led the way on, and did not leave her till she had passed the gates.

The hackney-coach which had brought her was no longer there, although it had been ordered to wait; for the man had found another fare, and had driven away without ceremony. Gertrude's courage did not fail, however; for into the course of her short life so many vicissitudes had been crowded, that circumstances did not daunt her which would have terrified persons of a more tranquil fate. All that she feared was, to lose her way; for she had never been in the neighbourhood of the Tower before; and the many small and crowded streets through which she had to pass in her way thither, had prevented her from gaining any very clear knowledge of the road. She resolved, therefore, to get another coach as soon as she could find one; and, following the general direction of the streets towards Southampton Place, as far as she could judge of it, she hurried on through the busy crowds, till, suddenly, after walking for nearly half an hour, she found herself upon what seemed to be the very verge of the town; for in the indistinct light, a field and trees appeared before her, and it was not till she had gazed for moment or two, that she discovered the open space to be surrounded by houses on three sides at least. Her heart sank at a sight which showed how much she had gone wrong; and while she was pausing to consider what next to do, a carriage drove up to the door of a house near which she was standing, and an elderly gentleman issued forth. With slow step he was crossing towards the door, when Gertrude, choosing her course at once, ap-

proached and asked him, if he could direct her on the way to Southampton Place; adding, "it is long since I was in London before, and I have lost my way."

Leaning his two hands upon his gold-headed cane, the old gentleman turned round and looked at her attentively.

"Hum," he said; "my good girl, you should not be walking the streets so late as this at night, if you don't know them. Southampton Place is a long way off."

"The hackney-coach in which I went," replied Gertrude, "drove away, though I told the coachman to wait for me."

"Ay, you paid the rascal first," said the old gentleman; "what have you got in your basket?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Gertrude, beginning to feel somewhat impatient at his prolixity. "I beg you to direct me on my way, if you can, and if not, I will go."

"Stay, stay," said the old gentleman, "I will tell you more in a minute. Who are you going to in Southampton Place?"

"I am going to the Lord Russell's," replied Gertrude.

"If you are sure of that," rejoined the old man, "and that you are known at Southampton House, I will take you there in my carriage, basket and all; for I am going thither myself directly."

"I am quite sure," answered Gertrude; "and Lady Russell herself will thank you."

"Well, come in here, then," said the old gentleman; "you must wait a minute in the hall; but you will not be kept long, for I am a man of business."

As he spoke he rang the bell, and while Gertrude was hesitating how to act, the door was opened by a man-servant dressed in dark-coloured clothing, while another was seen a step or two beyond, holding a light. "Your mistress expects me, I think," said her companion.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "she will come to you in the library."

"Will you let this young person," continued the old gentleman, "wait a little here till I can——"

But as he spoke, the full light fell upon Gertrude's face as he turned towards her; and he suddenly paused, as if struck by her appearance. "Odds life," he cried, "I have seen you at Lord Russell's with my own eyes—but in another dress—in another dress. My eyes are old, but they are sharp. Nobody can cheat me. The hall is no place for you, madam. You, sir, Thomas Bourne, show this lady into a room, where she can wait till I have the honour of conducting her to the Lady Russell's."

"Certainly, sir," said the servant, who had heard the whole

of this strange address. "She had better walk up stairs to the withdrawing-room, there is no one there."

"Ay, still nursing—still nursing," said the other, "you go with him, young lady. I can find my way to the library. I know it well, for I have drawn many a paper there. Go with him, go with him."

The servant held the light, gazing for a moment at Gertrude as he did so; and thinking, perhaps, that the dress and the person were not very well assorted. The young lady followed, and was shown into a large dark room on the first floor, where the man lighted the tapers which stood upon the table, and left her. Old dark furniture of antique shapes, but not bad taste, surrounded her, as she stood and gazed around; but there was withal an air of comfort and even opulence in the objects that met Gertrude's eye, which reminded her of the state of Ellerton Castle some years before. She was weary and exhausted, and after glancing round the room, she seated herself in one of the tall-backed chairs, and fell into thought. In two or three minutes a door opened not far distant, and she heard a faint voice say, "Do not be long; I shall be worse again, if you stay."

She thought she had heard those tones before; but they seemed to confuse rather than to guide memory; but at all events the associations, indistinct as they were, were not pleasant.

The next instant a sweet woman's voice replied, "I will be but a few minutes.—It is a matter of business, which must be done;" and the door was heard to close. Without the warning even of a quiet footfall, Gertrude saw a light suddenly burst upon the other side of the room, and a female figure in deep mourning, full of exquisite grace, appear in a door-way, which she had not observed till then. The lady advanced towards a table with her eyes cast down, and stretched out her hand to take a bundle of papers which lay there, without noticing that there was any one in the room besides herself. But the low rustle of her visitor's garments, as she rose, called her attention, and for an instant she stood gazing at the fair apparition before her in astonishment.

Her face was mild and sad, and no change but that look of wonder came over its expression. "Are you seeking me?" she asked, advancing towards the young lady, and setting down the light, while her eye rested upon her beautiful face, evidently with admiration as well as surprise.

"No, madam," replied Gertrude, with some embarrassment. "I am waiting for an old gentleman, who, I believe, now he gets to find you below. He has promised to take me back our father."

to Southampton Place, for I had lost my way, and could not find the coach which took me out."

"Oh, well," answered the lady, "very well,—I will not detain him long;" and she took a step or two towards the door. Then stopping, she turned round again, and said with a smile, "I have a strange wish to know your name.—I think I have seen your face somewhere before."

Gertrude hesitated for an instant; but her situation was strange, and might seem suspicious. She risked nothing, she thought, by answering the implied question, and she replied, "My name is Gertrude Ellerton, madam."

"Gertrude Ellerton!" cried the lady, her whole face lighting up, though there was a sadness in it still. "Then I have seen you at last! Well, you are very lovely.—I do not wonder."

Gertrude was confounded, and the colour rose high in her cheek.

"Pardon me!—pardon me!" continued the lady, "I was taken by surprise. I would not pain or grieve you for the world. I know all about you, though you do not know me; and there are moments when the heart's feelings rush to the lips without passing through the cool and tardy brain. If you wait but a few minutes, Lord Alcester—you know who I mean, the present Lord Alcester—will be here. Sit down, sweet girl. Can I do aught to serve you?"

She was evidently still much moved, and Gertrude, almost alarmed—agitated, at least, more than if she had been in a situation of real danger—answered, "I thank you, nothing, madam; if it be not to speed me on my way as fast as possible; for there are servants waiting for me at a place they call Abchurch Lane; and, as I have missed them, I must send to tell them I have returned. I shall be glad, indeed, to see my cousin Henry, but I must not wait even for that."

"Then I will despatch this business with Master Whitaker in an instant," said the lady, "and let you go. Let me take your hand once in mine, Gertrude Ellerton; for we shall never meet again; and yet, many a thought, both bitter and sweet, have you given to Henrietta Compton!"—and, after pressing her lips upon Gertrude's hand, she left the room.

What a strange thing is the human heart! How many are the tones of that fine instrument!—how many thrilling harmonies, how many harsh discords, may be produced from it by the lightest touch! I have always thought it like the Æolian harp, from which the breath of the light wind can call forth strange melodies. Gertrude sat down, and wept.

Five minutes more elapsed, and then a slow creaking
hole

ascended the stairs. It was the old lawyer; and, with ceremonious politeness, he informed Gertrude that he was ready to have the honour of escorting her to Southampton Place.

Giving her hand to the old gentleman, she suffered him to lead her down the stairs, not without a longing to see once more poor Henrietta Compton. In the hall, the lawyer himself took up her basket; and the servant who was waiting threw open the outer door; but, as they were on the point of going out, Gertrude stopped suddenly, saying, "Henry!" and a tall and graceful man, richly habited according to the somewhat ungraceful costume of the time, paused upon the steps before them, and took her hand.

"Gertrude, you here!" he exclaimed; "how comes this?"

"By a very strange accident," she answered, "which I will tell you hereafter, if you will come to see me at Southampton Place, where I much need your help and counsel."

"Alas! I can give little help there, I fear," replied Lord Alcester. "I am the juggler no longer, Gertrude; and all my magic powers would not avail to turn the passions of rash, bad men from pursuing a course of cruelty and wrong, which will have its retribution hereafter."

"My lord, my lord!" said the lawyer, in a low voice, "remember what ears overhear."

"That is no treason, my good old friend; and my loyalty has been proved by the fire of persecution," replied Lord Alcester; "but it matters not: I will be moderate at your bidding.—To see and to consult with you, dear Gertrude, I should have been in London long ago, but I have had much to do; and, since I came, I have been busy too. Yet, hark! a word in your ear."

"I have his pardon,—full, complete, and liberal," answered Gertrude to something he whispered. "Did I not tell you so when last we met?"

"Yes, but his pardon touches not the estates," replied Lord Alcester; "they have passed away beyond recall, and all that has been done to secure them will, I fear, prove vain, without interminable suits at law, which would put a barrier between you and him you love."

Gertrude bent her head sadly. "Lord Russell told me," she said, "that he had means of inducing the Earl to do justice, and restore them; but, alas! he is now a prisoner."

Lord Alcester mused for a moment. "Most likely he could have the power, were he at liberty," he said at length, speaking apparently of Lord Russell. "I have often wondered how he could consent to this grant, which conveyed away your father's lands. To suppose him a party to aught which

has the least taint of dishonour, is to suppose truth falsehood; and yet he did consent to this, and lent a willing aid to gain the estates for your uncle, instead of Lord Escrick, who sought them. I can but suppose it was upon some guarantee that they should be restored if your father's sentence was ever reversed, and his innocence established, as he well knew it would be. You have not seen the Earl, I suppose?"

"No," exclaimed Gertrude. "Is he in London?"

"Yes," replied her cousin, "and I have seen him twice. To my immediate marriage with Emmeline he consents, because he dare not refuse; and besides, it fulfils his chief desire, the alliance of acres and the matrimony of purses. But on another point, my sweet cousin, he is cold and icy.—I will not chill you, however, with such painful themes. Farewell for to-night, dear, good girl. You shall see me and hear news of your father's abode to-morrow, I promise. Let that cheer your slumbers, and scare away evil visions."

Alas! it did not do so; for, after a long and grave conversation with Lady Russell, Gertrude sought her bed, not to sleep, but to ponder over the probable blight of all her dearest hopes—hopes which had been cherished during a long period of adversity, and which seemed destined to perish when a gleam of brighter days came to shine upon her house; like the flowers of the early year, that abide the storms of winter and the rains of spring, but wither under the first sunshine of the summer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIR WILLIAM ELLERTON sat in his little chamber alone. He leaned his head upon his hand, and deep sadness was apparent in every line of his fine but worn face. Nor was it alone that sadness which comes from great and heavy misfortune, even long endured, but rather that of cares—gnawing, small, diurnal, pitiful cares. The great misfortunes fall and crush, or are endured and cast off. It is the daily, anxious care that clings to the brain or heart, and sucks slowly like a vampire, till all be dry, the sources of mental and corporeal energy. His thoughts were not of the outlaw at that moment,—nor of long, perhaps perpetual, banishment from his native land,—of the station he had lost,—of the happiness gone; no, they were of money—of the dross which each man affects to despise, and the want of which, in this our strange society, is a prosy that renders us disgusting to others, and wears us down with cramps insupportable to ourselves.

"It is all gone," he thought; "I have not three guineas

left of all that we have been saving during two years for this unfortunate attempt. I have not means either to return or to support myself, and to borrow of my kind-hearted companion, when I have no hope of repayment, is to be a beggar under cover of deceit.—Hark! he comes back. I must get him to return to the country. He must not know how low my means are now.”

There was a cheerful voice upon the stairs, and the sound of several feet. “It must be some one for the people below,” thought Sir William; “none come to me with such gay tones.”

The steps passed the story underneath, however, and the voices were still cheerful. The door was flung open quickly, and underneath the long powerful arm which cast it back, Gertrude sprang in and reached her father's bosom. Tears stopped her for a while; but at length she could speak, and then came the tale of the pardon and the search, and the long and anxious expectation; but it was not till her story was half ended, that her father saw she had two companions, Dick Myrtle and Lord Alcester.

It is almost always upon the first step to something beyond that we fix our desires. That is attained, and then we seek another. In our self-deceiving moderation, we believe that the smallest portion of a great whole would content us; and we hide beneath a thick veil the real object, lest its immensity should daunt hope and stay exertion. It is nothing less than perfect happiness; and an internal voice tells us, we cannot reach it on this side the tomb. We think, then, we can be satisfied with less; but each advance shows us another to be made, and still we are lured on, till, weary with the way and disappointed with our progress, we find that we have climbed a mountain to reach a precipice. Our foot hangs over the abyss; we cannot withdraw it. The last step is taken; but it is beyond the veil, and those who follow can see no more.

Sir William Ellerton had for many a day longed for the words which should restore him to his native land, as the camel in the desert longs for the well. He had thought that little more was needed for contentment. Wealth he cared little for. He had fancied that, for all he wanted, he could toil without reluctance, and for a few moments he felt the fulness of the blessing of restored security. But then there came the memories of by-gone days, the easy affluence, the calm, intellectual enjoyment, the hours without care or anxiety, the ancestral castle with its pleasant resting-places, the attached dependants, the happy tenantry, the joy of doing good, the sunshine of beneficence. He longed for the things

that were past. He was not ungrateful, indeed; he was thankful to God, and all who, under God, had contributed to the great relief afforded him; but nature instantly turned to contemplate the next step in the ladder of hope, and while he embraced his child with tenderness and a dewy eye, and shook hands with Lord Alcester, he murmured, "Now, dearest Gertrude, if I could but see you happy, methinks I should have nought left on earth to desire."

"We must think of how her happiness can be best sought—I dare not yet say, best attained," observed Henry Maldon; "but, my dear Sir William, there are difficulties which, I fear, will be found very great, and questions too weighty—or perhaps the word should be, too delicate—to be decided without much thought and consultation. For the present, you must make my house your home; and I have already appointed a very shrewd and subtle man of law to meet you there in an hour. He will be better able to guide us than any one I know; for, in addition to his legal learning, which is immense, Whitaker has great knowledge of the world and of the human heart. Nevertheless, I fear that our path is beset with obstacles."

"I fear it is," answered Gertrude's father; "if I know my cousin of Virepont aright, he will never forgive what is past."

"He who is in the wrong never does," replied Lord Alcester; "and although Francis is as true as truth itself, and firm too, as honour and integrity can make him, yet it would be painful to see the son act in direct opposition to the father's wishes."

"I would not, for aught that earth could give," said Sir William Ellerton, "nor would my daughter, I am sure, ally herself to a house unwilling to receive her."

Gertrude's heart sank. It is wonderful how little those not moved by love, know or recollect love's power of moving. What was pride to her? What reasonable obstacle did she see in the unjust objections which her lover's father might now oppose to a marriage which he had once sought so eagerly? Did the mere fact of parentage, she thought, give him the arbitrary power of depriving of all happiness for life, not only his own son, but one whom he had taught to expect the happiness he now denied? Her fate, however, was in the hands of others; and with deep sadness she saw the view her father took of her duties.

Sir William Ellerton asked no questions regarding her feelings or opinions; but led her back to Southampton Place, as soon as he heard the promise she had made to Lord Russell, to remain with his sorrowing lady. He thence proceeded with Dick Myrtle and Lord Alcester to the house of the latter, where they had not waited long before they were joined by

the old attorney. There, many points were explained to Gertrude's father, with which it is unnecessary to trouble the reader. Suffice it to say, that Sir William Ellerton showed that, before his flight, he had made over formally to his daughter all his rights in the Ellerton estates, and that certain nominal quit-rents (such as the delivery of a pair of gloves, a peck of peas at midsummer, et cetera), for copyhold properties held of the manor, had been paid to her while residing at the cottage of old dame Hennage. The testimony of Dick Myrtle, on several matters affecting the question of possession, was called for and given; and when the old lawyer had heard all, and pondered over it for a few minutes, he said, with a dry laugh, "Capital materials for a long suit, Sir William. Marry your daughter quickly, or your grand-children will not see the end of it."

Sir William Ellerton looked grave, and replied, "Then the matter is hopeless; if life and inclination lasted, means would be wanting."

"Not so hasty yet, my worshipful," replied the old lawyer, "there are some things yet which may give a more speedy termination. Your party—that is the noble Earl—is just now in a great fright,—fright makes people wonderfully equitable,—perhaps if we can show him good cause to believe that he will have a troublesome case of it, he may enter into some arrangement. I will look into his grant of these lauds, and see what can be seen. It is rarely such things are manufactured without a flaw, but at all events, I know that the Lord Russell, poor man, could make him comply with our demands by a few short words."

"Then the thing is done," said Lord Alcester; "Russell will never fail to do an act of justice."

"Too fast, too fast again, noble lord," said Mr. Whitaker; "Lord Russell can do nothing till he is beyond the walls of the Tower; God send him safely out of it; but I much doubt;" and the lawyer shook his head very sadly.

"Why, I thought you told me, Whitaker," said Lord Alcester, "when I saw you last night at the house of Mr. Camden, you were certain that the noble lord had committed no act which could bring him in danger of the statute for high treason?"

"So I was, and so I am," replied Mr. Whitaker; "but there is a great difference, my lord, between statute law and lawyers' law. The Lords and Commons, in Parliament assembled, consider a whole question that is laid before them, debate, discuss, decide, and vote, and the thing becomes the law of the land; but let no one think that he is safe in keeping within the statute. However clear it may be, a judge will see

something to explain in it. One Lord Chief Justice will nibble, and another will nibble, till there is not a shred of the parchment left. I have heard of a jeweller who had to cut a diamond. The diamond was worth a thousand pounds when he got it; but he cut and he cut, and he fined and refined, and he polished and re-polished, till, when he had done it, it was only fit for a glazier. So it is with the laws of England; and I do not believe that there is one single statute which, after all the interpretations that have been put upon it, retains the slightest portion of the original meaning of the men who framed it. Besides, there is nowadays such a thing as constructive treason as well as real treason, and constructive treason is a manufacture of the lawyers. Let no one, I say, fancy himself safe under the law, for there is no security in it.—Besides, this is not all. There are bad things going on. Sheriffs devoted to the Court can easily pack juries, and that they will do so in this instance is not to be doubted. I know what they are about; but we shall have our challenge, thank God! and I do not think they will dare to refuse it, although, on my life! there is not much reliance on their want of courage where the object is to crush a political enemy."

"A sad view of the case, indeed," said Sir William Ellerton; "then where is liberty and justice to be found?"

"With truth and honesty, wherever that may be," answered Whitaker; "and that is not in England, worshipful knight. We are great merchants, and have exported those valuable commodities. However, to return to the immediate subject: if Lord Russell contrives to escape this persecution, I will undertake that we shall have no great difficulty with the Earl; but as I have no confidence in the result of the coming trial, it may be as well to see what can be done with his lordship of Virepont while he is still in a goodly fright. No time is to be lost, indeed; for the fright may wear off, and therefore I had better get into my coach, and go to him at once. I may as well, methinks, couple your demand for the restitution of the estates with a notification that you look upon it as a settled thing, that the formerly proposed alliance between the two families is to take place, as if nothing unpleasant had occurred."

Sir William Ellerton shook his head. "Your plan will not answer, Mr. Whitaker," he said; "you are not aware, I think, of the circumstances. The Earl would sooner restore the estates than consent to his son's marriage with my daughter. You must know that, though persecuted and outlawed, I returned to England two years ago. I met him alone in my own park, accused him of his dishonesty, and made him draw his sword. But the very ground seemed to know I was no longer

its master. It slipped away beneath my feet, and I fell wounded before him who had betrayed and plundered me. He is not a man to forget the words then spoken, or the deeds then done. Had you been aware of this——"

"Oh! I was quite well aware," answered the lawyer, interrupting him; "every one in London heard that two elderly gentlemen had done a very foolish thing in a certain corner of Ellerton Park; but I observe, my noble sir, that as love reigns from eighteen to thirty—blending with ambition, as colours do in the rainbow—from thirty to forty, at which time ambition gets the better and reigns supreme, so, in after life, revenge is succeeded by avarice, mingling with it sometimes, for a short period, till avarice gains the rule of all, and subjects every other feeling to itself. I mean, of course, with men subject to such passions, for there be some unsusceptible of love, ambition, hate, or cupidity. Now, by mingling the two things together, which are our present objects, I think we have a better chance of success than by any other means. If I ask him to give back the estates, as I am informed he at one time professed his intention of doing, he will answer No, he would rather keep them himself, and take his chance of the suit. If I ask him to marry his son to your daughter, he will reply, That she is a very charming young lady, in which I perfectly agree, but that she has no dowry. If, however, I show him that he is very likely to lose the estates if he refuses the alliance, but to keep them in his family, at all events, if he accedes, I think it more than likely we may make an arrangement as agreeable to the young people as to yourself."

Sir William Ellerton mused a moment or two, and then answered, "I love not such traffic, my good friend. I have gone boldly forward to my object through life, and am unwilling now to begin with tortuous diplomacy."

"Nay, let him try, Sir William," said Lord Alcester; "whatever you might do for yourself, you must not allow a mere punctilio to interfere with Gertrude's happiness. Francis de Vipont, too, has some claim upon you."

"I love him as my son," replied Sir William, warmly. "Try, try, if you will; but I doubt much that you will succeed."

"Then I will lose no time," said Mr. Whitaker; "and to tell the truth, my noble lord, I shall be glad to get out of your house; the terrible array of blackamoors in your hall makes me feel as if I was in some fell enchanter's castle, and the loss of your long black beard does not quite satisfy me that you are not a sorcerer still."

"My poor Moors are very innocent," answered Lord Alcester.

ter, and have been very serviceable. Spain gave me food when England would afford me none, and Africa furnished me with servants; but haste away, my good old friend, and let us know the result as soon as possible. Here is Sir William Ellerton's residence for the present. You know where the Earl is to be found."

"Oh, yes," answered the lawyer. "You come with me, Master Myrtle. I may want a bottle-holder; or, at all events, some testimony. And this grim old lord is not to be shaken by mere asseverations. Alack! I am old enough to remember him a snug young man, writing love verses, and sighing for your father's sister, my lord."

The expedition of Mr. Whitaker, however, proved vain. On arriving at the Earl's house in King's Square, Soho, there were found several servants in the hall; but in answer to the lawyer's inquiries, they said that Lord Virepont had set out that morning on his return to Ellerton Castle.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"~~SEEK~~ him, Francis,—seek him!" said the Earl of Virepont to his son, at an early hour of the same morning of which I have just been speaking. "It is evidently at him that all these rumours point, and beyond all doubt he is already in treaty with the Court to betray us all. Lady Ranelagh told me that the peer who was about to come in, as they call it, and furnish complete evidence of the plot, was no other than Lord Howard; and if he has preserved that unfortunate note of mine, it will direct their inquiries to the other more important letter."

Francis de Vipont had just returned from a visit to Lady Russell, where he had remained longer than he had intended, in the hope of Gertrude's return. That hope was disappointed; but he had there heard the rumour which his father now repeated to him, and had meditated gravely over the circumstances as he returned. He had never before seen the Earl so moved; the calm, stern demeanor was all gone; and even the resigned composure which he had displayed for a time at Ellerton had given way under anxiety and suspense. The very agitation which his father suffered to appear was, as his son well knew, perilous in the extreme, at a time when suspicion was alive and busy in every quarter; and, eagerly desirous of removing him from a scene where his own fears were likely to betray him every moment, he had inquired while on his way back from Southampton Place, as to the possibility of hiring a vessel for Holland. He had found, however, that it was now too late to try such means of flight, and another plan had suggested itself to his mind.

"I will go instantly, my dear father," he replied; "I have ordered already both my horses and yours. Forgive me for doing so, and for saying that you must leave London."

"But the river is guarded, Francis," said the Earl; "all the ports are watched."

"I know it well, sir," answered his son; "but there are means of concealment in England which will serve the purpose till the present strict guard is relaxed. Listen to what I propose:—You have not been at the small estate I inherit from my mother for twenty years, and are perfectly unknown to the tenants. The house is ready for your reception as I had thoughts of letting it. Lying between Winchelsea and Rye, it is so near the sea-coast that, whenever occasion serves, you can escape if there should be need; and as your name is not yet in any proclamation, your going to your son's house, without quitting England, cannot tell against you, even at the worst. But I am sure you might there lie concealed for months, the situation is so lonely, and so few people know that we have any property there at all."

The Earl mused, and seemed to hesitate. "The suspense and anxiety would be terrible," he said at length; "better, I think, remain, and hear all as it occurs."

"It has been the destruction of Lord Essex," said his son, "and will be yours, also, my dear father, if you hesitate."

"Lord Essex!" exclaimed the Earl; "what of him?"

"He was lodged in the Tower yesterday evening," replied Lord Francis; "all was prepared for his escape, but he vacillated so long that he was apprehended at Cassiobury by a party of the guard. I do beseech you follow my counsel, and set out at once. Mount your horse when it is ready,—ride out with me as if going on some ordinary business, and after a while turn off to Winchelsea. If you can trust in any of the servants, you can take them with you; if not, there is a peasant and his wife in the house, good people, and not so rude as many of their class, who will serve you to their best, if you tell them you have taken the house from me. Emmeline had better remain where she is; but as soon as I have dealt with this Lord Howard, I will come down and communicate the result to you."

"Well, my son, well," said the Earl, "I will go; and I will take Grove with me. But do not wait for me; I must make some preparation. Set out for Knightsbridge at once, and perhaps you may be back before I go."

"He is not at Knightsbridge, my father," replied Lord Francis; "my ride must be longer,—as far as Tolibury in Essex. Had he been at Knightsbridge you should have had tidings of him long ago, for I went thither twice yesterday."

"That is a long way. I give you much trouble, Francis," said the Earl.

"Trouble, my father!" exclaimed Lord Francis, in a reproachful tone, pressing his hand; "one thing is fortunate amongst many which are quite the contrary,—poor Charles Maldon's illness will prevent him from giving evidence, even if called upon, for many a day to come; and, in the meantime, if there should be danger, we can easily contrive your escape to Holland."

"Where is he now?—Have you found him yet?" asked the old lord.

"Yes, I find that he has been removed to a house in Red Lion Fields," replied Lord Francis. "It is part of a large inheritance fallen to Henrietta Compton from her grand-uncle, and as soon as she found that Charles was sick she had him moved thither, and is tending him with the deepest devotion."

"Ay, so it is," said the Earl; "sometimes those towards whom we have done most wrong prove our best friends in time of need. Well, well," and he fell into deep thought.

A moment after the servant announced that the horses were ready; and, bidding his father adieu, Lord Francis de Vipont set out for Essex.

When he reached the house of Lord Howard at Tolibury, he found every window closed; but he tried, though in vain, to obtain admission, thinking that the bad man he sought might, perhaps, be lying there concealed, notwithstanding the deserted appearance of the place. Satisfied, at length, that it was vacant, he returned with speed to London; and though he did not reach the Earl's mansion till midnight, he found Emmeline waiting for his return in much anxiety concerning her father, who had gone without giving her any explanation. It was not that he mistrusted her in any way, but the habit of reserve, although in some degree broken through, from the absolute necessity of communication with his children, was too strong to be altogether overcome.

Early on the following morning, the young nobleman hastened on foot towards Knightsbridge; but in passing the corner of Constitution Hill he saw the messenger into whose hands he himself had fallen for some hours, conversing with a sergeant of the king's guards. The man's back was turned towards him; and as Lord Francis passed he exclaimed, with a laugh, "Oh, no fear!—we shall have his lordship. You be opposite the Knightsbridge door in half an hour and we will get in the backway."

No time was to be lost; and hurrying on as fast as he could Lord Francis approached Lord Howard's gate, and rang

the bell. The servant who appeared denied that his lord was there, and declared with the most vehement asseverations that he had gone two days before to Tolibury.

"My good friend, you are doing your lord a dis-service," answered Lord Francis. "I wish to give him some important information. My name is Lord Francis de Vipont, and you had better inquire whether you may admit me."

The servant, however, still adhered to his story, although the young nobleman told him plainly that he had been to Tolibury on the preceding evening; and disappointed and half angry, Lord Francis was turning away, but the good spirit which was always predominant in his heart, induced him to give the unhappy man an intimation of his danger; and pausing before the gate was shut, he said, "Tell your master, my good friend, that ere half an hour is over he will have the king's guard here to search for him, so he had better look to his safety. One party will come to the front, the other to the back of the house; and if he be in it, as I believe he is now, he will not escape them."

"My lord is not here, sir," replied the man; but he ran away from the gate again so quickly, that it was evident to the young nobleman he saw cause for apprehension.

Hardly had Lord Francis de Vipont proceeded a hundred yards from the house when he met a small party of the guards, under the command of a sergeant; and crossing the road, he stationed himself under the wall of the park to watch their proceedings, and to ascertain, before he followed his father to Winchelsea, whether Lord Howard was captured or not.

The moment after the party halted before the gates of Lord Howard's house, and the young nobleman saw three of them detach themselves from the rest, and march down a lane between the walls of that and the neighbouring garden, as if to take post at the back of the house. All was still in front, however, till at the end of three or four minutes several of the council messengers joined the soldiers, and the search almost immediately began. The gate bell was rung, and no servant immediately appearing, the messengers gave intimation of their authority and power by ringing again and again till the gate was thrown open, when the whole party entered at once, without asking any questions, and the soldiers took possession of the court-yard.

The messengers, on their part, entered the house and began their perquisitions by examining the lower stories. From room to room they ran in vain; not a trace of the master was to be seen. Hats, sticks, and swords, had been removed, and every room was vacant. They then mounted the staircase, and the two upper stories were strictly examined.

They looked under the beds, and into the closets, and behind the curtains, but still Lord Howard was not to be discovered. Meeting again in the best bed-room, for they had separated on the search, they were comparing notes and consulting as to examining the out-houses, when a small bit of mortar rolled down the chimney, and then a quantity of soot.

"Ah, ha!" cried the messenger, Browning, darting towards the chimney; "here we have his lordship's private cabinet. Somewhat of a strange one, but I doubt not we shall find him here."

Then putting his face close to the wide open chimney, he first looked up, and then stretched out his arm and felt all round the inside. The next instant he exclaimed. "Come down, my lord. It is of no use, you are discovered, and I should be sorry to use force."

The next instant, with his hands, face, and clothes grimed with soot, Lord Howard descended from the chimney, and stood in the midst of them, presenting an object at once pitiable and ridiculous. His eyes were filled with tears, his limbs shaking with fear, and his bosom heaving with sighs. His bitter and vehement spirit was completely cowed, and he exclaimed, in a lamentable tone, "Take me to the King at once, Mr. Browning. I will make a clean breast of it—I will tell all I know, if his Majesty will be gracious to me."

"You had better wash your face and hands, my lord, and change your dress," said the messenger; "we have orders to bring you directly before the Council; and you are not quite in a pickle to appear. I must stay with you; but, in the meantime, the rest can search for your papers, and it will save some trouble if you will tell where they are."

"I burnt them all, upon my honour and conscience!" replied the miserable man. "There are my keys, you can search where you like; but you will find nothing but some law papers, and some accounts. All the rest I burnt three days ago."

"There take the keys, Bennet, and search all the drawers and cabinets," said the chief messenger. "We must do our duty, my lord, according to our orders."

"I know you must, Browning," replied Lord Howard. "Hark! a word with you. I know you have the King's ear, Browning," he whispered; "tell him I can give him information well worth having, if he will show mercy. He cannot prove anything against Russell or Sydney without me."

"I will tell him what your lordship says," answered the messenger, with a look touching upon disgust; "but you had better make haste, for we must not linger. Shall I call a servant?"

"Yes, do so—do so," said Lord Howard; and the moment after the messenger called from the door to send up Lord Howard's man. The despicable prisoner inquired, in an eager tone, if they had orders to arrest any one else.

"None but those who have been proclaimed," replied Browning; "there is enough, in all conscience. Lord Grey has got off. He made Wilson, the messenger, very drunk, and left him asleep in a hackney coach, at the gates of the Tower, after calling the lieutenant to open the gates to receive a prisoner. The King laughed till he cried when he heard it; but Wilson will be dismissed and fined, without doubt, notwithstanding." The messenger himself laughed as he told the story; but Lord Howard was in no mood for merriment, and continued to ask the names of all who had been apprehended, and against whom warrants were out, calculating, there is every reason to believe, how he could so shape his information as to render it most serviceable to himself, by pandering to the vengeance of the court party.

But few papers, and those of no importance, were found in his house; and when he had changed his clothes, and removed the traces of his foul place of concealment from his person, a hackney coach was sent for, and he was placed therein with a messenger on each side."

As the vehicle drove through the gates, his eye fell upon Lord Francis de Vipont, and he exclaimed, "Ha!" while his first impulse certainly was to inform the messenger of all he knew concerning the young nobleman's father. He refrained, however; upon what motives it may be difficult to say. It is true the Earl's name was in no proclamation, he had not by any of his known acts rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the Government, and little credit or advantage could be obtained by betraying him; but still the worst men have some good qualities, and better feelings will rise up to mingle with and soften their basest actions. We may trust, therefore, that some feeling of gratitude towards Francis de Vipont, for the information of danger which he had conveyed, had a share in checking the treacherous words upon the lips of Lord Howard.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was night, and Lord Russell sat in his prison chamber alone. The day had been passed partly in the society of his wife, partly in consultation with his lawyers. From the one, he had derived comfort and consolation, from the other, he might have derived hope; for, while giving him every instruction as to his course on the following day, which was appointed

For his trial, they had taken care to hide, as far as possible, everything that could depress his mind, or impede his natural energies. But Lord Russell could not, and did not entertain hope. The lawyers themselves did not see the peril of his position as clearly as he saw it: not that he had deceived them, even in the slightest particular; for he had told them even more than was necessary for them to form a just judgment of the bearing of the law upon his case; but they were lawyers, and they merely looked to the statute and the interpretations which it had received; and, knowing him to be truth itself, they were convinced from his statements that he had done nothing which could bring him within its denunciations. Lord Russell took a wider view of the question. He asked himself, not how the law affected him, but how the enmity of a king and a king's heir was likely to act against one who had opposed the march of the one towards despotism, and moved a bill to exclude the other from the throne. He knew that his death was resolved, and that means would be found to accomplish it under semblance of law.

It is precisely in those cases where two extremes meet, and where the high virtue which for a worthy object dares death and ignominy, is only separated by a narrow line from a pernicious crime that it is easy by the slightest alterations of the facts, the most specious imputation of motives, to persuade the minds of men that the bounding line has been passed, and to condemn with the appearance of equity. If there be any case in the world where it is more necessary than in another, to have the most clear and satisfactory proofs of criminal acts and criminal intentions before condemnation, it is in that of a trial for high treason; and yet there, more than in any other trial, injustice is likely to be done; for the questions to be discussed, the points to be considered, involve subjects on which all men's minds are prejudiced; and judge and jury enter the court as party men, to try an opponent or a partisan.

Lord Russell, however, knew his fate; it was a conviction that nothing could shake, an impression not to be effaced, that he was to be one of the first victims to the regained ascendancy of the Court. He was as well aware as the King, that despotic power could never be raised upon a secure basis in England as long as he lived, and that, therefore, he was already doomed to die.

But still he suffered not that consciousness of his coming fate to depress him, to weigh upon his spirits, or agitate his calm and resolute mind. He could sit down and think of death as tranquilly as of a journey to the country; and he did so. With his head leaning on his hand, he remained for

nearly an hour in meditation ; but he had cast away from him all recollection of the conversation just past, of the hopes expressed by his dear wife, of the arguments and instructions of his lawyers ; and he suffered his mind to run over the years far gone, till, travelling along the diminishing path, it reached the misty period of youth, almost of childhood. He remembered when he was a little boy, a younger brother, at a country school ; and then, when fresh from college, he had set out upon his travels little less a boy than when under the master's ferule, and how he had talked at Lyons with Christina, the murderer of Monaldeschi, and had run away from his brother at Augsburg, to go and seek the army of the Swedes at Ulm ; and how he had trifled amongst the gay dames and wits of Paris, and sported and fought duels in the capital of his own land after the Restoration. He regretted those times : he repented many of the acts then done and the opportunities neglected ; but yet he could not help feeling his heart warm to the memories of the young days, when life in all its brightness was before him, although in the world's wilderness of flowers he might have sometimes lost his way. But then, as he cast his eyes to scenes nearer to the dark present, fresher and less tarnished joys appeared. He saw her he most loved in her young beauty, as he had first beheld her ; he ran over the period of his courtship and his marriage ; he remembered the birth of each child, the sicknesses, the anxieties, which had visited his domestic home ; the pleasures, bright and pure, which had effaced the traces of those griefs, like the sun's rays blanching the spotted web of life. On that last period, how fondly, how proudly rested his thoughts ! He felt that since his marriage with that excellent woman, he had been daily becoming more firm, more noble, more virtuous, more Christian ; that the personal courage which had always distinguished him, had become moral courage which nothing could daunt, nothing could shake ; that to her he owed the firmness, at least in a degree, which would enable him to part even from herself, not without a regret, but without a weakness. He sat, then, and called up the image of each person whom he had loved through life—his noble father, his brothers, his sisters, good old John Thornton, and Nidd, and Cavendish ; and the face of each fair child came bright, and looked at him in the gloom of night and the solitude of the prison. But those old memories shook him not. To the virtuous and the wise, there is a vigour in tenderness, a strength derived from the holy affections of the heart. They had been the good whom he had loved through life ; and he felt that he would be worthy of their love in death. He took no resolution how to act in the coming scenes, or what to say, or how to demean

himself. There was but one course for him, one way, one line of action for such a mind as his. He could have sooner bent the stubborn malice of his enemies to mercy, than his own calm and upright nature to a meanness. He wanted no forethought, he required no support but what he had.

Thus thought he for more than an hour; then knelt and prayed, and then lay down and slept almost as in childhood. Such was his preparation for his trial.

At an early hour of the following morning Lord Russell was awake, and as soon as the regulations of the prison admitted, Mr. Holt one of his counsel, and Mr. Whitaker his solicitor, were introduced; and he then received intelligence of the trial and condemnation of Walcot, Hone, and Rouse.

"If they have deserved their fate," said Lord Russell, "I grieve that there are men so wicked; but I see not, gentlemen, how their condemnation affects me, as, to the best of my knowledge, I never beheld one of them in my life."

"Their trial, the day before that of your lordship," answered Mr. Holt, "is well devised to have an effect upon the jury. These men have, certainly, been guilty of a great crime; and it is a weakness common in men's mind, when the existence of evil designs is proved, to believe that every one charged has participated in them."

"It was done to make the jury believe you guilty before they tried you, my lord," said Whitaker; "to shift the *onus probandi* from the Crown to you, not formally, but really. To oblige you to prove yourself innocent, rather than for them to prove you guilty, and, if you failed, to gain a verdict not by the evidence, but by the prepossession of the jury. Will your lordship let me look at the list of the pannel?"

"Here is a general jury list," replied the noble prisoner, "but it is no pannel. None has ever been delivered to me but this."

"Your lordship must object to this," said Holt, taking the list. "How is it possible for you to know the character, fortune, and feelings of every man in such a large catalogue as this?"

"Let me look at it," said Whitaker, taking it from his hand.

"I know all these men better than you do, Mr. Holt. They will pass over your objection, and we must be prepared to challenge as many as possible; for, to my certain knowledge, the two court sheriffs have been packing a pannel." He then ran over the list with his eye, at the same time drawing his finger slowly down the paper from name to name, and when he had done, he gave it back, saying, "Why, there are not a few freeholders amongst them."

"That is fatal to the list, then," replied Holt; "the second

of Henry the Fifth is precise. Each must have a freehold of forty shillings in the year at least, otherwise he cannot sit on a jury in a case of life or death. Stay, I will draw up a note for your lordship's guidance in your challenge."

While he was so doing, Whitaker took the paper again, and, with a pencil, put a cross against an immense number of names, saying, in a low voice, to Lord Russell, "All these I have marked must be challenged. They are all bad men, or men who voted for North and Box at the election of sheriffs—mere tools of the Court. They must not sit. Then, here is a man convicted of perjury two years ago, a base, bad man."

"They will answer their purpose well, I doubt not," answered Lord Russell, and, turning to the window, he gazed out for a moment or two. "It is strange," he said at length, keeping his eyes fixed upon the windows of a part of the building nearly opposite, "Essex retires as soon as he sees me. I trust one of his fits of black melancholy has not seized upon him. I never saw a man whose vigorous mind was so much subject to the sway of spleen."

"A letter from my lady, sir," said his servant, Taunton, entering; and with an eager hand Lord Russell took and opened the note in which Lady Russell first proposed that beautiful act of devotion, for which she is more generally famous than for all the many traits of the same noble spirit which were less apparent to the public of that time, though they ought to be as well known in our own day.

"Your friends believing I can do you some service at your trial," so Lady Russell wrote, "I am extremely willing to try. My resolution will hold out—pray let yours. But it may be, the Court will not let me; however, do you let me try. I think, however, to meet you at Richardson's, and then resolve. Your brother Ned will be with me, and sister Margaret."

"Oh, my noble Rachel!" said Lord Russell, with a sigh; and then, turning to Mr. Holt, who had just finished the notes he had been making, the prisoner applied himself with more earnestness than he had shown at first to the preparations for his trial.

After all was concluded, and Holt had withdrawn, Lord Russell detained Whitaker for a few minutes in conversation, carried on in a low tone. "Has he fled, then?" he asked, at length.

"So it would seem, my good lord," replied the attorney: "but as yet I hear no charge against him. His name is in no proclamation."

"What! not even since Lord Howard's apprehension?"

asked the prisoner, with a slight smile. The lawyer shook his head, and Lord Russell added, "Well, we will see; if I escape, I will keep him to his word."

"Were it not well, my lord, to frighten him a little?" said Whitaker. "That letter would soon make him do justice, and I fear nothing else will."

"Mr. Whitaker," answered Lord Russell, sternly, "I trust that the Earl of Virepont knows me too well to believe, even were I to say it myself, which no inducement on earth would lead me to do, that I would betray any man, even the most base. All I regret is, that I did not burn the letter at once; but it is safe enough, though in a place which much embarrasses me."

"Well, my lord, you are the best judge," said Mr. Whitaker; "but I myself think it quite fair, if a man refuses to perform his engagements, to take any means that may be at hand to make him do so. If I had to drive a pig, I would not much hesitate whether it was a cudgel or a cart-whip that I took to him. Your lordship knows the engagements which this nobleman entered into with yourself, and he certainly shows no inclination to fulfil them."

"He has not been tried," replied Lord Russell, gravely; "but say no more upon the subject, sir: my views upon these points are quite fixed," and, bowing low, Mr. Whitaker left him.

"Now that is a very honest man, as the world goes," said Lord Russell to himself; "and yet it is strange, he would work honest ends by dishonest means."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE thirteenth of July was a sad and agitated morning in Southampton Place. The whole household was troubled, for not one servant or dependant, from the highest to the lowest, did not feel as if the life of a father was at stake. Day had scarcely dawned when Lady Russell was in the library, surrounded by lawyers and friends; and persons, continually coming and going, brought her news from without, often of little importance, but often of serious moment. Nevertheless, in her manner there was no hurry, no agitation; she was always ready to listen and reply, though her words were necessarily few and short.

Amongst all those who came and went, however, Gertrude Ellerton only saw her once, and that only for the purpose of inquiring if she could be of any assistance. Lady Russell replied kindly in the negative; and Gertrude merely added

few words reminding her that she had promised to take her to the court that day."

"My poor child, why should you go?" asked the lady. "You love my dear lord well enough to make it a terrible scene for you; nevertheless, do as you will, though I cannot insure admittance."

"I will try at all events, dear lady," answered Gertrude, and left her. Retiring to her own room, she there sat down to meditate till the hour for setting out arrived, and all her reveries were very sad. She had a double interest in the event of the great cause then to be tried. Esteem and gratitude towards Lord Russell were sufficient in themselves to awaken terrible apprehensions with regard to the result; but, at the same time, Gertrude could not forget that upon his acquittal might depend the fulfilment or disappointment of all the long-cherished hopes of a young and ardent heart. The words he had spoken to her in prison, regarding his power over her lover's father, and his promises to exert that power if he should obtain his liberty—words and promises which by his lips could not be spoken in vain—still rang in her ears, telling her that upon his fate, though apparently unconnected with her own, depended her whole happiness for life. During the last two or three days, her mind had been very much depressed; for during that time she had not only not seen Francis de Vipont, but had not heard one word of where he was, or what detained him from her side. She was anxious, troubled; but no feeling of reproach for his long absence and seeming neglect entered her breast; for she well knew that he would not be absent from her if he could avoid it, and that to neglect her was not in his nature. She tormented herself with striving to divine the cause, however, and fancied that now this thing and now that detained him. Like all persons of quick imagination, she ran through the whole range of probabilities, and found but little comfort in any of them. At one time she thought he might be ill, at another that his father had commanded him not to see her; and although she believed that in either case he would have sent her some communication, yet the half-rejected conclusion still troubled her, and she felt that suspense was very difficult to bear.

Even in sad meditations time frequently flies quickly; and ere she knew how far the morning had advanced, Lady Russell's woman came in to say that her mistress would go in five minutes. Preparing rapidly, Gertrude hurried down, and found her heroic friend ready to enter her carriage. Her brother-in-law and sister were with her, and not a word was spoken from the time they left Southampton Place till they came into the vicinity of the Old Bailey. Lady Russell re-

maintained in deep thought, probably preparing her mind for the terrible scene she had to go through, and none of those who accompanied her would interrupt her meditations. At length when the carriage stopped, she awoke from her reverie with a start, and telling Gertrude to wait a few moments, she alighted with Mr. Russell and her sister.

Crowds gathered round the coach and looked in; and a number of persons, from time to time, were seen passing, with hurried steps, into the Old Bailey, till at length Gertrude perceived the old solicitor, Mr. Whitaker, and directed one of the servants to call him to the carriage. The worthy gentleman had just approached, when Mr. Russell returned, with a hasty step, and, opening the door, told Gertrude that he had been sent by Lady Russell to conduct her into the court.

"She is not there herself yet," he added, "but is gone to wait with her lord at Richardson's. I must return to them as soon as possible; so come, dear lady, come."

"If you will allow me, sir," said Mr. Whitaker, "I will conduct the young lady. I am somewhat knowing in the intricacies of the courts of law."

"Then to your charge I leave her, Whitaker," replied Mr. Russell; and in another moment Gertrude found herself hurried along upon the old man's arm, first through the gaping crowd without, and then along the narrow passage leading to the court.

When they approached the door, it seemed to the inexperienced eyes of Gertrude that it would be impossible to enter, so great was the crowd in the passage, and so angry the gestures of the door-keepers, who were repelling the people from the entrance; but Mr. Whitaker forced his way forward with less difficulty than she expected, saying, "I am an attorney in the case, sir, let me pass;" and clearing a path for her at the same time. When he got within sight of the door-keepers, to whom he was well known, the difficulty was at an end; for they opened a passage for him among the people with their staves. When he reached the door, he whispered a word to one of the men who kept it, but received for answer, "It is mighty full. You may make your way on to the attorney's bench, sir; and, perhaps, the lady may find a gap behind you, but I doubt that she will see much."

While these few words passed, Gertrude's eyes were running over the sea of heads before her, and her heart sank at the sight of the crowd, and the dull, misty atmosphere, and the hurry and confusion which seemed to reign in the court; but at that moment she saw a hand raised from the other side of the hall, near the seat of the judges, as if beckoning to her;

and the next instant the fine head of her cousin, Lord Alcester, appeared, sufficiently raised by his own height to be seen over almost every one in the court, but apparently lifted up still more by his standing upon some elevation. He beckoned again when he saw that he had caught her eye, and then, stooping down, spoke to some one below him. The next instant, Dick Myrtle was seen shouldering his way unceremoniously through the crowd, with an air of right and authority which caused the old attorney to smile, but which so far imposed upon others as to make those yield him a path who were not intimidated by his powerful form.

"Here, lady," he said, "my lord says you are to come up near him;" and taking her hand, he fought his way back again, till he reached the spot where Lord Alcester stood, while Mr. Whitaker followed till he reached the place reserved for the attorneys.

There was in those days a flight of six low steps which led from the body of the court up to the bench, on the side opposite to that where the jury box was situated; and though it was as customary then as now, for persons of distinction to take their seats with the judges in any case of importance, Lord Alcester, unwilling to do so, from feelings within his own breast, had, with the consent of the officers, placed himself on those steps to watch the progress of the trial. One or two other persons were there also, but there was room for several more, without interrupting the passage up to the bench; and her noble cousin placed Gertrude on the step above him, where she could sit, and yet see all that occurred in the court.

"You should not have come hither, dear Gertrude," he said, in a whisper; "this will be a scene to shake stout men's hearts."

"I came with Lady Russell," replied Gertrude, in the same tone, as he still bent over her; "I promised him I would be with her as much as possible; and I may comfort her as she returns. Is my father here?—he did not come to see me yesterday."

"No, he is not here, and yesterday he went to pay his duty to the King," said her cousin; "when he returned, you had set off with your sweet hostess to the Tower."

Gertrude would fain have asked one question about Francis de Vipont, but she feared to trust her voice; and raising her eyes—which had been cast down, from a feeling that her passage through the court had called attention upon her—she gazed round, with anxious and wondering eyes, upon a scene so new and painful.

The court, as I have said, was crowded in every part; and

immediately in front, round the seats of the counsel, were many splendidly-dressed people, some looking very grave, some laughing and talking, as if waiting at a theatre for the curtain to draw up. Behind these again was a multitude of the inferior class, with an air of stern seriousness upon almost every countenance. There was no one in what is called the dock; and when she turned her eyes towards the bench behind her, at the sound of a footstep above, she only saw one of the officers of the court, who took up a paper which seemed to have been dropped, and immediately retired. The seats of the judges were unfilled; and near ten minutes elapsed before the slightest movement gave notice that the trial was about to commence. Once or twice Lord Alcester spoke to her in a low tone; but they were surrounded by many persons, some of whom he seemed to know, so that conversation upon any subject of private interest was out of the question.

At length there was a murmur, and a sound of feet moving; and, turning towards the bench again, Gertrude saw a grave and dignified man, in the full robes of a judge, advance and take his seat, laying down a roll of papers on the desk before him. His face could not be called fine: but it was certainly very expressive; and the fair girl thought it stern, when, perhaps, it was only self-sufficient.

"That is Sir Francis Pemberton, Lord Chief Justice," whispered Lord Alcester; "God send, dear Gertrude, that he may make no new law to-day; for he boasts that he has made more law than king, lords, and commons; and he has made it ever to the disadvantage of the accused."

"Hush!" said a voice near, and Lord Alcester was silent. Six other judges followed, and ranged themselves in order on either side; and then the usual forms took place, almost unintelligible to poor Gertrude, till there was a considerable movement in the court, and all faces turned from the judges towards a point just opposite. Gertrude's eyes followed the direction of the rest, and the moment after, with a calm, firm footstep, and untroubled countenance, Lord Russell appeared, and advancing between his guards, was placed within the bar.

A short pause ensued, while a considerable noise prevailed in the court, and then, after a thundering cry of "Silence!" a man rose, and turning towards Lord Russell, directed him to hold up his hand; after which he proceeded, in a low, murmuring, and hurried voice, to read the indictment, charging the prisoner with conspiring the death of the King, and consulting and agreeing to stir up insurrection.

Then came the question, "How say you, prisoner, Guilty, or not Guilty?"

"My lord," said the noble gentleman at the bar, "I beseech you that I may have a statement of the matter of fact laid to my charge, in order that I may know how to make answer thereto;" but the Chief Justice, in courteous terms enough, informed him that he must, in the first place, plead to the indictment; and the prisoner at once replied, "Not Guilty."

He then sought to show that it was unusual for a prisoner to be arraigned and tried on the same day, and urged that it was a great hardship, that no interval was allowed for preparation between the first formal statement of the crime with which he was charged, and the defence which he was called upon to make, showing that several of the witnesses in his favour could not arrive in the capital before night, and that he had not yet received a correct list of the pannel, but merely an ordinary jury list.

There were two fierce-looking men in black gowns, seated close together, just in the line between Gertrude and the prisoner; and the one nearest to her starting up, exclaimed, "Hard, do you call it? Do not say so. The king deals not hardly with you; but I am afraid that it will be found you would have dealt more hardly with the king. You would not have given the king an hour's notice for the saving of his life."

Lord Russell made no reply, but fixed his eyes calmly and steadily upon the Attorney-General—then Sir Robert Sawyer—and repeated his demand for a proper copy of the pannel, and that his trial should be put off at least for some hours. His request, however, was refused; and the clerk of the crown then rose again, and said, in a more distinct voice than that in which the indictment had been read, "Take notice, prisoner at the bar, that if it be your intention to challenge any juror, you must make your challenge before he comes to the book to be sworn, and before he is sworn."

"I beseech you, my lord," said the prisoner, "that I may have the convenience of pens, ink, and paper, and the use of any papers which I may judge necessary to my defence."

"Assuredly," replied the Lord Chief Justice; "no sort of privilege shall be denied you which becomes a subject in your condition to have."

"May I have somebody to write, to help my memory?" asked Lord Russell, still addressing the Chief Justice.

Ere Pemberton could answer, however, Sawyer, the Attorney-General, replied, "Yes, a servant."

"Any of your lordship's servants," said the Chief Justice, "shall assist in writing anything you please."

Lord Russell raised his head; and replied in a voice firm and

first, but which shook a little, as if with emotion at the last words, "My wife is here, my lord, to do it."

"If my lady please to give herself that trouble," answered Pemberton, and a sign was made to one of the officers of the court to bring Lady Russell in. A very brief pause succeeded, and then, led in by Mr. Edward Russell, appeared the wife of the patriot, pale as marble, the warm colour of her cheek all gone, but with a step composed and firm, an eye undimmed, and full of calm, collected light. Gertrude saw her give one hasty glance round the court,—on the array of judges and of jurymen, and the gazing multitude; and, moved for her friend, more than that friend, supported by a high sense of duty, was moved herself, the fair girl bent her head, and the tears flowed fast and silently. Meanwhile, a low solemn murmur of sympathy and admiration ran through the court—subsided—and for an instant all was still as death. When Gertrude raised her eyes again, she saw Lady Russell seated at a small table near her lord, with pen and ink before her. Her look was turned to him; her lips quivered with eagerness to catch his lightest word; judge, jury, gazing multitude, were all forgotten; she thought of nought but Russell.

Then came the calling of the jury, and their challenge for want of freehold. In plain and manly terms, Lord Russell demanded that the unrepcaled statute of Henry V. should be observed, and that none but freeholders should sit upon his trial. But in answer to this, Sir Francis Pemberton proceeded in his usual course, and made a law contrary to the statute to suit the purpose of the moment, replying, that the city of London was an exception to the rule, on account of the landed property thereof being principally vested in noblemen and gentlemen not living within its walls. As this, however, was a point of law, the prisoner's counsel were admitted to argue the case, and proved, beyond all doubt, that such an exception as that made by the judge had never been contemplated by the statute.

To them, Sawyer replied first, and then the rude and blood-thirsty Jeffries—rising at that time to his unenviable notoriety, and already fixed upon by the Court as a tool, ready, keen, and unscrupulous, for the work of tyranny and slaughter. In a tone of savage merriment he ridiculed the idea, that in London none could sit on juries, in cases of life and death, without a forty-shilling freehold; and he declared that, if the prisoner's counsel could prove that, they would have to move for a writ, to bring many men, better than himself, out of the grave, who had been condemned without such qualified jurymen. In the end, after a consultation with his brethren of the bench, the Chief Justice delivered the opinion of the court, ruling that

the challenge could not be admitted, and which he pretended to interpret the object and meaning of the statute, explaining away its precise terms, as has been so frequently done in British courts, to the disadvantage of the accused.

The names of the jury were then called over one by one; and consulting the paper as marked by Whitaker, Lord Russell challenged thirty-one. The rest were then sworn, and the trial proceeded.

In this place, nothing but a sketch can be given of the further transactions in that cause; but the reader is requested to remember the proceedings at the house of Shepherd, on the night when Gertrude Ellerton first visited her father there. After the address of the Attorney-General, Colonel Rumsey was the first witness called, and was suffered to enter into a great deal of irrelevant matter, the very questions put to him by Jeffries leading him to a general statement, rather than a strict deposition. He then came more immediately to the point, and swore that he had visited the house of Shepherd, the wine merchant, in Abchurch-lane, to bear a message from the Earl of Shaftesbury; that he there found the Duke of Monmouth, Lord Russell, Lord Grey, Sir Thomas Armstrong, and Mr. Ferguson, in conference together; that he delivered the message from Lord Shaftesbury, urging the necessity of an immediate rising; that Mr. Ferguson returned an answer for the whole, to the effect that, as Mr. Trenchard had failed them, in regard to his levies at Taunton, nothing more could be done for the time. He added that some conversation took place regarding a declaration, and as to the best means of surprising the king's guards, and that the Duke of Monmouth, Lord Grey, and Sir Thomas Armstrong, undertook to visit the Mews and their other posts, to ascertain their alacrity and state of preparation.

"Was the prisoner at the bar present during the whole of that debate?" demanded the Attorney-General.

"He was," replied Rumsey.

"Did he concur in it?" demanded Jeffries.

"He agreed to it," answered the witness; and Jeffries, turning to Lord Russell, asked him, if he had any questions to put.

"Very few," answered the noble prisoner, "for I know little of the matter. I was there by accident," and he was proceeding to state that the proposed surprise of the guards, and the raising of an army had not been mentioned in his presence, when the Lord Chief Justice called him to the simple question of whether he had any interrogatories to put to the witness.

"I desire to know," exclaimed Lord Russell, fixing his eyes

firmly upon Rumsey, "if I gave any answer to any message about the rising?"

"Yes," replied Colonel Rumsey. "My Lord Russell did speak of it."

"How should I talk of a rising at Taunton," exclaimed the prisoner, indignantly, "when I neither knew the place nor had any acquaintance with Trenchard?"

The Attorney-General, I must remark, suffered the answer of Rumsey to stand as part of the evidence, although he well knew that in his third information to the council, the witness had given a very different account of the affair. But he sought a conviction, not justice, and, of course, it was not his business to throw discredit upon his own witnesses.

Thomas Shepherd was then called, and deposed to the circumstances of the meetings at his house, of which he stated there had been two. He first implied that the prisoner had been present at both these meetings, and at one or the other a declaration had been read, setting forth the grievances of the nation; to which he added, that the declaration was in order to a rising, but he could not remember the words. He would not swear, however, that Lord Russell was present when the declaration was read, but did swear that he was there when the discussion took place about seizing the guards.

"I never was in your storehouse but once," said Lord Russell, in a mild tone, "and then there was no such design that I heard of. I desire that Mr. Shepherd may recollect himself."

"Indeed, my lord, I cannot be positive as to the times," replied the witness. "My lord, I am sure, was at one meeting."

"The question is, was he at both?" said the Lord Chief Justice.

"I think so," answered Shepherd; and he proceeded to declare that he could not recollect positively.

Lord Russell replied, he could prove that he was in the country at the time of one of the meetings mentioned by the witness, and pointed out that Colonel Rumsey had stated there was but one meeting; when suddenly that worthy person stood forward in the court, and declared he did not remember whether he had been present at one or two meetings at Shepherd's, but added, if he had been only present at one, he had heard Mr. Ferguson relate the debates of the other meeting to Lord Shaftesbury.

"Is it usual," asked Lord Russell, turning towards the judge, "for the witnesses to hear one another?" But the Lord Chief Justice would not entertain the objection; and Lord Howard of Elicrick was then called, and proceeded to

make a long, artful, but irrelevant deposition, carrying his story back as far as the election of the sheriffs in the preceding year. He spoke in a low voice, and with much agitation, till at length one of the jury asked him to speak louder, as they could not hear him.

"There is an unhappy accident just happened," said Lord Howard, "which has sunk my voice. I was but just now made acquainted with the fate of my Lord of Essex;" and a rumour immediately spread through the court, of Lord Essex having destroyed himself in the Tower.

After a momentary pause, the witness proceeded to detail the whole of the wild schemes of Lord Shaftesbury, endeavouring, in an artful manner, to connect Lord Russell with the Earl's criminal designs by hearsay evidence, which should have been immediately checked by the Bench. It was suffered to go on so long, however, that at length Lord Russell himself interfered, exclaiming, "I think it very hard that so great a part of the evidence is hearsay."

"There is nothing against you yet," replied the Attorney-General, in a flippant tone; "but it is coming to you, I assure you, if your lordship will have patience."

The witness then proceeded to detail several conversations between himself and Captain Walcot, and himself, and the Duke of Monmouth, giving dates, which, unfortunately for his credibility, are distinctly contradicted by his own declarations to the council.* He afterwards turned to the question as it affected Lord Russell, and declared that, after the flight of Lord Shaftesbury, a cabal, or council of six, had been chosen to direct the operations of the conspirators, of which Lord Russell was one; and he detailed the pretended conversation which had taken place at two meetings of the cabal, and asserted that the prisoner had been present, and consenting, when a debate occurred as to the proper place for beginning the insurrection proposed, as to the sums of money to be raised for the commencement of their project, and as to the means of engaging the malcontents in Scotland to afford a di-

* In his evidence in court, he relates a conversation with the Duke of Monmouth, regarding a proposed attack upon Charles, some time after the seventeenth or eighteenth of October; and in his declaration he states, that after the fourteenth of October he never discoursed with the Duke as to the attack upon the king. Both are positive statements, made without any doubt or hesitation; and, though there never was a narrative more artfully constructed than that of Lord Howard, it shows, by such discrepancies, that gentlemen who place themselves in his position ought to have very good memories. Colonel Rumsey, also, before two years were over, was unfortunate enough to forget his deposition at the trial of Lord Russell, and committed murder, by perjury against another innocent man.

version to the English rebels by a rising in that country. He then proceeded to state that the members of the council of six, having met at the house of Lord Russell, came to a determination to send a messenger to some of the leading gentlemen in Scotland, to call them to consultation, and that a person named Aaron Smith had actually been sent, as he had been informed by Colonel Sydney.

Upon this point the Attorney-General laid considerable stress, probably regarding it as an overt act. "You are sure that my Lord Russell was there?" asked Sawyer.

"Yes," answered the plausible traitor; "I wish I could say he was not."

Some further evidence was then given, of no great importance; but every witness that was called seemed, to the inexperienced mind of poor Gertrude, to swell the difficulties with which her friend and benefactor would have to contend; and when Lord Howard concluded his evidence, and she found that Russell asked him no questions, she looked up, with an expression of alarm upon her face, to Lord Alcester. But that nobleman's eyes were turned upon the prisoner; and after a short pause, the name of Robert West was pronounced, and the lawyer entered the witness-box. His deposition was very short, and should not have been admitted at all; its production being merely a base attempt on the part of the crown lawyer to connect the case of Lord Russell with the horrible conspiracy for the assassination of the King, on account of which Walcot, Hone, and Rouse had been condemned the day before.

"My Lord Russell," he said, in answer to a question of the council, "was the person we all most depended on, as he is a man of great sobriety."

"Can I hinder people from making use of my name?" exclaimed the noble prisoner, in an indignant tone. "To have this brought to influence the gentlemen of the jury, and to inflame them against me, is very hard."

"My lord, we have done," said Serjeant Jeffries, addressing the Chief Justice; and Pemberton turning to the prisoner, called upon him for his defence.

"I will, in the first place, remark," replied Lord Russell, "that one of the principal witnesses against me, Colonel Ramsey, is a man who is notoriously under the deepest obligations to the King and the Duke of York. It is now admitted that he entertained, within a few days of this time, the design of assassinating both those royal personages, and I demand, is it at all to be wondered at if now, to save his own life, he endeavours to take away that of another? But I require to be informed upon what statute I am tried; if on

the thirteenth of his present Majesty, which makes it high treason to conspire to levy war, the period is expired at which the prosecution can lie; if on that of the twenty-fifth of Edward III., a design to levy war is not treason by that statute."

"You are prosecuted, my lord," replied the Attorney-General, "on the statute of the twenty-fifth of Edward the Third. It has been often decided that to prepare forces to fight against the King is a design within that statute to kill the King."

"This is a matter of law," replied Lord Russell. "Moreover, there is but one witness to the transactions at the house of Mr. Shepherd; the law requires two; and I desire that my counsel may be heard to argue these two points."

"If your lordship will admit the facts," said the Chief Justice, "your counsel shall be heard as to the law."

"That I will never do," replied Lord Russell, solemnly. "I am ready to swear that many parts of the testimony are false; and Colonel Rumsey did not dare to make the same statements before the King some days ago which he has made here. I claim to be heard by counsel."

"Let the statute be read," said the Lord Chief Justice; and, some further discussion upon the law ensued, when the case of Lord Stafford was assumed as a precedent that two witnesses swearing to separate acts of the same treason, their testimony was to be received as if they both swore to one. The admission of counsel to argue the point for the prisoner was refused, and Lord Russell proceeded with his defence, moved by the injustice shown him to one touch of sarcastic bitterness. "My Lord Howard," he said, turning his eye full upon the spot where the witness stood, "hath made a long narrative of what he knew. I do not know when he made it, or when he did recollect anything; yet it is but very lately that he did declare and protest to several people that he knew nothing against me, nor of any plot I could in the least be questioned for."

He then called several witnesses to prove that on various occasions Lord Howard of Eserick had denied the existence of any plot. Lord Anglesey, Mr. Howard, and Dr. Burnet, all testified to the same fact, and the first-named gentleman proved that the witness had gone out of his way to assert Lord Russell's innocence. A multitude of the noblest, the wisest, and the most pious men of the land, came forward to declare their conviction that the prisoner was incapable of committing the crime with which he was charged; but no impression was to be made upon a packed jury and a prejudiced court. A low of satisfaction, however, came upon the

face of Lady Russell as she heard such testimonies to her lord's worth, and, perhaps, the faint flame of hope burned a little more brightly; too soon, alas! to be extinguished for ever.

After a few words from Lord Howard, who attempted to explain his assertion of Russell's innocence, the prisoner again addressed the court. His manner was plain and simple, and his speech is too well known to be repeated here entire. He pointed out the hardships and difficulties of his case, left alone, without the aid of counsel, to contend for life against a number of the ablest lawyers in the land. He expressed a hope that the judges would deal equitably, and act as counsel for him; and he called upon the jury, as they valued innocent blood and the quiet of their own consciences, to remember that with the measure they should mete with, it would be measured to them again, in this world or the next. He pointed out that the witnesses might well be looked upon as persons desirous of saving their own lives at the expense of his; and he declared his loyalty to the King, and respect for the government as by law established. He repelled indignantly the charge that he had ever entertained an idea of affecting the King's life, and spoke of the assassination of a prince with horror, appealing to all his past conduct as a proof that he was incapable of so foul a crime. He asserted, in the most solemn manner, that he had not sought to raise a rebellion, stating that, had he been even so disposed, he had not seen any tendency towards it amongst the people; and he pointed out that in those days rebellion could not be made by a few great men as in former times. He stated his desire always to have been to maintain the government upon a just basis, and to seek redress of evils only by parliamentary means; and he pronounced himself opposed to all irregularities and innovations whatsoever.

The judges maintained a decent silence while he spoke, the jury listened coldly, but the people in the body of the court were moved considerably from time to time, as his fine voice and plain clear words came pouring in amongst them, bearing truth and sincerity in every accent.

When he ceased the crown lawyers addressed the court for the prosecution; but it will be only necessary to notice the indecent allusion of the ever-infamous Jeffries to the suicide of Lord Essex, committed but a few hours before, in order to prejudice the jury against the prisoner. He declared that the unfortunate nobleman who had so lately died by his own hands must have been conscious of guilt, or he would not have brought himself to an untimely end "to avoid the methods of public justice."

ⁿ The answer was clear, that in those days justice was not ^{to} hoped for in a court of law ; and that the Earl, by ^{his} ⁿⁱ act, had only prevented legal murder. But there was ^{so} ^{me} to make it : and the Chief Justice proceeded to sum up, ⁱⁿ ^h less prejudice than might have been expected.

^{cl} The judges then retired for a short time, and the prisoner ^{as} removed from the bar. Lady Russell followed : and ^a many of the counsel quitted the court. But the spectators generally remained ; and, at length, the Chief Justice and his colleagues reappeared towards four o'clock. As soon as the prisoner had been brought back, the foreman of the jury rose, with a pale and haggard countenance, and, in answer to a question from the bench said, in a faltering voice, " Our verdict is, my lord—Guilty of the said high treason."

A dark cloud came over Gertrude's senses, and for some minutes she neither saw nor heard.

CHAPTER XL.

EVERY effort had been made ; the King had been petitioned in vain ; the Duke of York had been applied to for his intercession ; all the high families connected with the house of Russell had used their influence ; and the Earl of Bedford, without his son's knowledge, had tried to obtain, through the necessities of the monarch and the cupidity of the royal mistress, justice, under the name of mercy, for a son iniquitously condemned to death. Moved by the anguish of his family, and unwilling that pride or obstinacy should be attributed to him by any one, Russell himself had been induced to address both the King and the Duke ; marking strongly, however, at the same time, the motives under which he acted, and his certainty of the result, by saying, as he signed his name to the petition, " This will be crying about the streets when I am on the scaffold !"

Though not entertaining the slightest expectation that his life would be spared, the noble prisoner opposed none of the efforts which were made to save him, merely remarking, as he heard of failure after failure, that he wished his beloved wife would cease to beat every bush for hopeless mercy. He himself was well assured of his fate ; but not the slightest fear or agitation affected his mind. Calmly and tranquilly, as if about to lie down to sleep, he prepared for death, and did not suffer even the awful event before him to affect the serenity of his demeanor. Even a gay jest would sometimes break from him at his present or his coming fate. A lady whom he knew well, having come to see him after his condemnation, he greeted her with a cheerful air, saying,

"Mistress Tressam, you always find me out in a new place; and, having been seized with a slight bleeding at the nose, he observed, laughing, "I will not be let blood to stop it. This will be done for me the day after to-morrow." It was impossible to perceive the slightest difference in his manner or mood, except when Lady Russell was mentioned, and then for a moment, a tear was observed in his eye, and he would suddenly change the conversation; but on all ordinary subjects he spoke readily with all who were permitted to see him, and spent the rest of his time in reading works of devotion. Two acts remained to be done, to complete a character perhaps the most perfect in history; for something yet remained to be added to the remarkable words of Mr. Gore, on the day of the trial, who pronounced him, in his evidence, "One of the best sons, one of the best fathers, one of the best masters, one of the best husbands, one of the best friends, one of the best Christians in the land." He was now about to show himself one of the least selfish men, and one of the most fearless patriots that ever lived.

It was night. Lady Russell had quitted him to make one last effort to move the inexorable King; and Lord Russell had been left for a few moments alone, when a message was brought to him that Sir James Forbes, having obtained permission to visit him, desired to know if he could be admitted.

"By all means," replied Lord Russell; "he is a very worthy gentleman, I shall be glad to see him;" and, holding out his hand to him so soon as he entered, he said, "This is a poor dim place to see you, Sir James; but I trust hereafter to meet you in a brighter one."

"I am sincerely grieved, my dear lord," said his visitor, taking a seat to which the prisoner pointed—"most sincerely, I assure you, to find you in this situation; and I came to offer you the assurances of that love and esteem which I entertain for you in common with all your acquaintances."

As he spoke he looked twice round towards the door into the ante-room which had been ajar. But Lord Russell, without noticing that circumstance, replied, "I can assure you, Sir James, and I beg you will assure all friends, that my condition is not so dismal as some may think it. It is always painful to part from those we love, even for a short journey: more so, of course, for a long one. That apart, and I know not what I have to regret, except, indeed, that I have not lived long enough to benefit my country. There, too, I have consolation: for I am inclined to believe that my death may be of more service to England than my life could have been. If so, I have cause to rejoice rather than mourn."

Though the words were remarkable, Sir James Forbes did

not appear to pay much attention to them ; but several times turned round his head, and looked towards the door. "The night is cold and chilly for midsummer," he said, aloud, as soon as Russell ceased ; "and if your lordship will permit me, I will close the door."

"Certainly," replied Lord Russell ; and the door was closed. With a quick step the knight returned to the table, and, leaning across, said, in a low voice, "I bear you a message from my Lord Cavendish, of great and immediate importance. His lordship has arranged a plan for your escape, and begs you to adopt it, as you may well now do, when you are unjustly and illegally condemned to death. He proposes, my lord, to visit you to-morrow night, about this hour, in a dress as unlike your own as possible. When here, an exchange of clothes can be made in a very few minutes. The passages are dark and gloomy. The man who lets you out, may see him dressed in your clothes, with his back turned ; and, by the means that he will take, there cannot be the slightest doubt, except in case of some strange accident, that you may quit the Tower unrecognised. A carriage will be ready to convey you at once to the mouth of the Thames, where a ship is already waiting to bear you to Holland. As he proposes to retire the moment you are gone your escape will not be discovered till pursuit would be too late, and you may be half-way to the Hague before it is known that you are gone."

Russell smiled thoughtfully. "It is very kind of him," he said, in a cheerful tone ; "and, indeed, such devotion in one's friends compensates well for the treachery of some men, and the enmity of others ; but I will make no escape, Sir James. Thank Cavendish for me, most kindly ; but tell him I cannot consent. Were these prison doors open, I would not go out in secret ; and, indeed, I thank God heartily that I was not tempted to fly when I could have done so easily. In this case I would never subject my best friend to all the evils which must fall upon him were I to accept his devoted kindness. Were there an object greater than life, I might be tempted—if my country's safety or liberty depended on it, as I know he would not regret a sacrifice, so I might think it fitting for him to make, and me to accept it ; but, as I have said before, I believe that England may be better served by my death than my life. A thousand thanks to you and to him ; but tell him I will not fly."

Sir James Forbes saw too clearly that his mind was fully made up, to offer any further arguments ; and after remaining a few minutes longer, he took his leave with sorrow but in admiration.

I will pass over most of the incidents, however interesting, which occurred during the last few days of Lord Russell's life. They are told in one much better, and many much worse works than this. But there is one act more to be recorded, by which he crowned his services to his country. There was but a single hope of saving his life, and that hope would have been a good one, could Russell have renounced the principles he had always maintained, or forsworn the opinions which he held. The King of England had rejected every petition in his behalf, and showed himself inexorable, under any condition but one, and there his ministers, if not himself, suffered a probability of mercy being shown to appear. From the first moment, after his condemnation, the worldly Burnet, and the unworldly Tillotson, laboured to persuade him that it was unlawful, under any circumstances, to resist established authority; and the noble prisoner answered so mildly, that he prayed God to forgive him if he had erred in his opinion on that point, that Burnet became convinced he would be ultimately brought round to his own expressed opinion. On these tidings, Lord Halifax communicated the supposed change to the King, informed Tillotson that the monarch was more moved by it than by anything which had yet been done in Russell's favour, and the two clergymen were filled with hopes which they speedily carried to the prisoner. But Russell had no disingenuousness, and he hastened at once to remove the false impression. Burnet persuaded, and Tillotson argued, in vain. Lord Russell, still mildly, but more distinctly than before, declared his opinion unchanged, and died in the belief and the assertion, that, failing all peaceable means, it is lawful, under a limited monarchy, to resist by arms the attempt to establish an arbitrary power. He enlarged, at various times, upon this subject; showed that he looked to Parliament as the constitutional check upon the prerogative—that, when duly elected and regularly assembled, they were sufficient for the object; but he still, to the last, maintained that where this check was denied or infringed, the right of resistance to aggression was in full force. Neither the hope of life, nor the fear of an ignominious death, nor the reasoning of two talented and well-meaning, but mistaken men, could shake the patriot in the least; and one of the things for which he thanked God in his last hours was, that the woman he loved best had never, in her anguish at his fate, or her eagerness for his safety, attempted to lead him to any baseness.

The last evening of Russell's life at length arrived; all had failed; he had received the sacrament, and the terrible task of taking leave of his wife and children had succeeded.

The latter he saw for the last time with perfect serenity, though the fondest and tenderest of parents; and when he dismissed them, he begged Lady Russell to stay, adding, "Let us take my last earthly meal together." But that meal he clouded with no sadness or repining, and, when at length the hour came for the last bitter separation, the husband and wife vied with each other in abstaining from all that could shake the composure of either. He kissed her often, it is true, before he parted with her; and when she was gone, he said, "Now, the bitterness of death is past!"

During the night, he slept with perfect calmness, and awoke to pray, as the preparation for death. His last hours were as serene as any in his life, and when the hour approached at which he knew that the sheriffs were to come to lead him to execution, he gave several commissions both to Tillotson and Burnet of an ordinary kind, and then, drawing the latter aside, he said, "I have something to communicate to you, Dr. Burnet, which you must not reveal."

"Indeed, my dear lord," replied the clergyman, "I must decline to receive the secret, if it affects the public safety."

"It is entirely a private matter," replied Lord Russell, "relating to an act which I am bound to perform before I die. I have been somewhat troubled in my mind about it; but it behoves me now to act in one way or another, and I have decided thus: When I am dead, you will give this small key, and this short note, to a young lady you must have seen with Lady Russell, named Gertrude Ellerton. You will also request my beloved wife to allow her young friend to act as I have there stated, without her presence, or that of any one else, as I do not wish Lady Russell to mix in this affair at all, for my children's sake. This is all, my good doctor. And now everything is said and done, I think. My watch I will give you, as a little memorial, on the scaffold." And taking it from his pocket, he wound it up, adding, as he finished, "I have done with time, now for eternity!"

A few minutes after, Captain Richardson, one of the officers of the Tower, announced to him that the sheriffs were come; and having prayed once more alone for a few minutes, he descended to the court with a firm step and a cheerful countenance. At the foot of the stairs he found Lord Cavendish waiting to bid him farewell for ever, and he spoke to him earnestly for a short time; left him, returned again, and once more addressed him gravely. He then entered his own carriage, with the words, "How great a crowd!" And Tillotson and Burnet having taken their places with him, the sad procession moved forward. The most cheerful person in the carriage was Lord Russell. There was no affected gaiety,

None of the sad efforts to work up a false courage so often seen, but a calm, placid serenity, which nothing but a conscience free of offence, and faith beyond this life, could afford. The streets were lined with people, many of the windows were closed, and the greater part of the men who watched the passing of the prisoner and those who guarded him on the way to death, took off their hats. Some few gazed and remained covered, with faces not dissatisfied, but very many wept. The way was cruelly long, for, although Charles would not consent to the barbarous scheme of having the prisoner executed before his own door, as some of the basest of a profligate Court suggested, yet he appointed Lincoln's Inn Fields instead of Tower Hill, thus prolonging the suffering of expectation for more than half an hour. The procession moved slowly, too, and, coming round by Holborn, passed through Little Queen Street; and as Russell looked towards his own house, he said, "I have often turned to the other hand with great comfort, but now I turn to this with greater." A tear, however, fell from his eyes as he spoke, and showed that the strong heart still felt acutely. It was the last sign of mortal tenderness, and in a moment after the scaffold was before him.

The crowd was immense, and seemed very turbulent; but the instant he appeared upon the platform, all was silent, and before he spoke he gazed over the sea of heads below. His eyes fixed upon one spot in particular for a moment or two, where a man richly dressed, but with a face as pale as that of a corpse, stared up towards the scaffold. Whatever it was that attracted his attention, Russell cast it from his mind the next instant, and then addressed a few words to the sheriffs, in a loud and distinct tone. He then prayed alone, and then with Tillotson and Burnet; gave his ring to the one, and his watch to the other; bestowed a reward upon the executioner, bared his neck, and laying down his head upon the block, raised his hands as if still in prayer.

He had declared he would make no sign, and the executioner, to aim his blow more surely, dropped the axe to his neck. The edge of the weapon touched him, but his hands trembled not. The axe was then flung high in the air—fell—rose, and fell again; and the noble and the good was gone.

CHAPTER XLI.

In the moment the sad scene was over, the immense crowd began to separate, and were doing so very quietly, when sud-

denly a good deal of confusion was perceived at the spot towards which, as I mentioned, Lord Russell's eyes had been turned for a moment or two from the scaffold. The cause was a quarrel between the well-dressed man at whom he had looked, and a stout tall man of about thirty, who had been standing near him. As the axe fell, the courtly-looking person said aloud, "There is one traitor sped, another shall soon follow!"

"You are a traitor yourself, I think," said the stout man by him, in a low tone; and turning round to go away as the rush from the neighbourhood of the scaffold had commenced, he brushed somewhat rudely, perhaps, against his gaily-dressed companion. The other turned fiercely upon him, called him an opprobrious name, and struck him. The act was retaliated by a strong arm, which instantly knocked him down, and two or three of those who were hurrying away towards Queen-street, pushed on by those behind, put their feet upon the fallen man. His situation was discovered a moment after, however, and he was taken up with blood streaming from his mouth. He was still alive, and when asked where he should be carried, answered, to Sir Frederick Beltingham's house, in the Strand. A hackney-coach was called, and he was placed therein; but before it reached its destination, Sir Frederick lay in a pool of blood at the bottom of the vehicle, and never uttered another word till his death, which occurred about two hours after.

Dr. Burnet had marked the confusion in the crowd, but his thoughts, as may well be supposed, were full of sadness and horror; and, without further inquiry, he hurried away to Southampton Place, where the windows were all closed. He was instantly admitted to Lady Russell, and remained with her for nearly an hour; but when he came forth from the room where the sad conference had taken place, he inquired of one of the servants who were sitting gloomily in the hall, for Mistress Gertrude Ellerton, and was immediately led to a small back room on the first floor, where he found her weeping bitterly.

She dried her eyes hastily when the clergyman entered, and Burnet, who had seen her once or twice before, took her hand kindly, saying, "Be comforted, my dear young lady. The only pang is past, and our friend is now better and happier than ever he has been, or could be, on earth. One of the last commissions with which he entrusted me, was to bear this letter and this small key to yourself; and I have Lady Russell's directions to enjoin you to act exactly as her late lord pointed out, without her presence or further consent."

The tears again streamed from Gertrude's eyes, for hope

lingers wonderfully in the mind of youth, and, till Burnet spoke, a faint imagination that her friend might even at the last moment have received a pardon, had clung to her. Now, all was over; and taking the note and key, she gazed at them through the dazzling drops which hung upon her long, dark eyelashes.

"You had better read the contents," said Dr. Burnet, "perhaps you may need some explanation which I can give."

Gertrude dried her eyes again, and, while Burnet moved towards the window, she opened the note, and read as follows:—

"To Mistress Gertrude Ellerton, in private, these—

"I had designed, my dear young lady, on the very day of my arrest, to give you a paper of importance to your father, foreseeing that I might be prevented from using it as I could have wished myself. Matters put it from my mind, as well as other things equally important, till I was here in prison. I did not choose, then, to direct you where to find it, as, in the same place where it lies, there is another paper, which, if by mischance it fell into cunning hands, might have tended greatly to my damage and to that of many others, at a time when mere hearsay is used for the downfall of honest men. This paper I did intend to return to the writer thereof with my own hands, whenever I could find him, but was prevented till it was too late. I have observed in you much prudence, and very strongly the virtues of sincerity and truth, and I therefore must trust to you, when I am gone to a better place, to guard the paper with great care and secrecy, till you can perform what is written upon it, and then to do so without divulging the contents to any one. I would have entrusted this to my dearest wife, but that, I think, if the paper should be discovered at any time by enemies, it cannot hurt you or yours, whereas, were it found in her hands or her house, it might be made to affect my children in their fortunes, seeing that their father is loaded with the charge of things he never even thought of. As some one must be trusted, I trust you, feeling sure that you will follow my wishes in all honesty. With prayers for your welfare and happiness, I now subscribe myself,

"Your faithful friend and servant,

"WILLIAM RUSSELL."

"Post scriptum.—I forgot to tell you that you must take the small key, sent herewith by the hands of good Dr. Burnet; and, going into my library, open a little drawer which you will find in the lower cornice of the large book-case on the west side of the room. You will there find the

papers of which I write. The one you will use discreetly for your father's interests, the other you will guard secretly till you can deliver it to the person whose name is written upon it."

"I understand my lord's directions," said Gertrude Ellerton, addressing the clergyman, "and will follow them exactly; but I think you gave me a message, sir, from Lady Russell, which I hardly heard."

"It was merely to request that you would do as her lord required, without her presence or further consent."

"Where is she now, sir?" asked Gertrude.

"In her own sad chamber with her two daughters," answered Dr. Burnet; "and now, my dear young lady, I will take my leave, for I must away to Bedford-house. Be comforted for your good friend who is gone; for be assured that this visitation, though hard to bear, is an effect of God's mercy and kindness. So he felt it, and so we ought to feel."

Thus saying, Dr. Burnet left her; and, immediately after, with the note and the key in her hand, Gertrude descended to the library and went in, closing and bolting the door behind her. She took a moment to consider which was the west side of the room, and then advanced to the book-case, where for some time she sought in vain for the key-hole of the drawer amongst the rich mouldings. At length, however, she found it quite at the end; and, applying the key, she easily unlocked and pulled out the drawer, in which two or three papers were lying open. The first she took up was merely a brief note, containing the following few short words in the handwriting of the Earl of Virepont: "Any time you will, my dear lord, between the middle of May and the middle of June. The country is in a fearful condition, and if we are to have no parliaments, what remedies have we?"

The next was also a letter in the same hand, but of much greater extent; and Gertrude read the first few lines in order to ascertain what she was to do with it. Those lines startled and surprised her, for they displayed at once the sketch of a plan for an organized rising in Devonshire, Somersetshire, and Dorsetshire: and she turned to the back of the letter to look for some directions regarding it. There was nothing there but the address, "To my Lord of Alcester, at his house at Malwood;" and, opening the sheet, she looked at the bottom of the third page, where the letter ended, and there found written, in the hand of Lord Russell, "This letter was sent to me by my attorney, from consideration for my interest, as my name is mentioned many times therein, about schemes of which I have no knowledge.—To be restored to the writer by the first safe occasion, with remonstrance upon the badness :

of his schemes.—Mem.—To ask W. how he got it. I can form no idea."

"This, then, is the letter," thought Gertrude; "but how am I to find the Earl? and it will be terrible to have such a fearful paper in my hands.—Well, I must hide it as best I can," and folding it carefully up, she placed it in her bosom.

One more paper remained below, and it also was in the same hand as all the rest. It was a short letter, addressed to "The Lord Russell," and dated nearly three years before.

"I beseech you, my dear lord," it ran, "as we are acting in the same good cause, not to go against me in the Council in the matter of the grant. You are well aware that there are two other persons applying for these lands, as well as myself; and, to set your mind at ease, as to what you have said regarding the innocence of Sir William, and the hardship of his case, I do assure you that my whole wish in seeking for this grant, is to hold the estates as a sort of trustee for him, and that I shall be ready, if at any time he purges his outlawry, to restore them to him, with His Majesty's consent." The letter was signed Virepont, and written upon the back in pale ink was found, "In case of my death, this letter to be transmitted to Sir William Ellerton, wherever he is to be found.—William Russell."

A momentary joy took possession of the heart of Gertrude Ellerton, but when she remembered the fate which had, that very morning, befallen the noble and considerate friend, a fresh act of whose kindness and thoughtful equity was before her eyes, the joy was extinguished in the grief, and tears chased away her smile.

Folding the papers carefully, she placed them in security with the other letter which she had taken; and, locking the drawer again, she returned to her own room, hearing a musical voice in the hall as she ascended the stairs. She had scarcely closed her own door, when a servant followed her to say that the Lady Emmeline de Vipont sought earnestly to speak to her; and, in another minute, she was in her cousin's arms.

"Ah, dearest Gertrude," she said, "how pale and sad you look, and your eyes are all red with weeping! I wonder not at it, for these are terrible times; but I bring you some little comfort, dearest. I know what it is to sit alone for long days together in suspense and doubt as to the fate of those we love; and, therefore, as soon as I heard of Francis, I came to tell you that he is safe, for I have been in great apprehensions for him during the last eight days, not having at all heard of him, or of my father."

"You are sure he is quite safe?" asked Gertrude, seeing that Emmeline's face still bore a look of anxiety.

"Quite safe," replied the lady; "I had a note from him not half an hour ago, inquiring after me and you. He is not ill, he says, but dreadfully fatigued; having gone over half England in search of my father."

"And has he found him?" asked Gertrude eagerly; "I must see the Earl directly, if he can be met with. Where is he, dearest Emmeline?"

Emmeline gazed at her with some surprise: "That I cannot tell you, Gertrude," she answered. "My brother writes he will see me at night, because he dare not venture out during the day, lest his coming and going should betray the place of my father's retreat. But why do you wish to see him, Gertrude? Be frank with Emmeline, as you always are."

"I would, were it a matter which affected myself," answered Gertrude; "but it does not, dear Emmeline. I must see him on business, important to himself alone, but to him most important; and I beseech you tell Francis what I say."

"Come and tell him yourself, my sweet sister," replied the lady; "he will be with me, he says, soon after dark."

Gertrude mused, with a faint smile, and then said, thoughtfully, "I do not like to leave dear Lady Russell, Emmeline; but yet I am acting by her lord's directions. Therefore, if you can send a carriage and servants for me after dark, I will see if I can come; for on such a day as this, I could take no one out of this sad house."

"I will not fail, love," replied Emmeline. "By Lord Russell's directions, did you say, Gertrude? That may be indeed important."

"Of the deepest moment, I assure you," answered Gertrude; "and you will not doubt me, surely."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Emmeline, eagerly, "men are now doubting everything; but he must be a sceptic, indeed, who could doubt you, Gertrude. Farewell, then, for the present, dear girl. We shall meet to-night;" and the lady left her.

As night drew nigh, Emmeline watched eagerly for her brother's coming. She was anxious, she was alarmed for a father's safety; for Lord Francis, in his note, had told her that the Earl had been prevented from reaching Winchelsea by dangers on the way; and that he himself had been obliged to pursue his track from one place to another, till at length he had received intimation at Ellerton Castle of where he was to be found. An hour passed after sunset, however, before Lord Francis came, and Gertrude was expected every minute, when, at length the door opened, and he appeared. Each had much to tell, but each told it quickly; and Gertrude's lover was

musings over the information he had just received, when a carriage rolled up; and the next moment a servant entered to say that he had been to Southampton Place, but found that the lady had gone out half an hour before, and had not yet returned. Both Emmeline and her brother were somewhat astonished, and those were days when alarm generally followed surprise. An hour passed, but Gertrude did not come; and we must go and seek her.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN the crowd which surrounded the scaffold where Russell sealed his devotion to his country with his blood, there was a powerful man who, as the reader has seen, knocked down, at one blow, another spectator, who had ventured at that awful moment to triumph in the death of the patriot. He took no further part in what followed, but left his adversary amongst the rushing multitude, and then retired a little, gazing upon the scaffold, and the hurried preparations which were being made for removing the bloody witness of the foul deed just performed.

"It is hard," he murmured to himself, "it is mighty hard, when a king has been recalled to a throne from which his father fell, and has made bargains to regain and keep it, that those with whom he engaged should have their heads chopped off because they try to make him maintain the contract. I love kings when they behave well, and a monarchy when it is not a despotism; but I do not love to see the best men in the land cut off; for then, I am sure, the worst have got the upper hand."

While he thus moralized, a man on horseback passed along as quickly as a jaded horse could carry him. His face was worn and haggard, and though his fine person, and well-cut, though dusty dress, bespoke attention, he seemed anxious not to see or be seen, and rode on towards the north-eastern corner of the fields, where stood a house, then detached, which was at that time used as a sort of Tattersall's of the day, but which joined the quality of livery stables to that of repository.

Into the court-yard the horseman rode direct, and the other man, who had watched him, followed slowly, saying to himself, "I shall catch him while he is stabling his horse." But while he was still a hundred yards distant from the gate, the cavalier whom he had seen came forth again on foot, and neither turning his head to the right nor the left, hurried away through the narrow passages of the Inns of Court, and was soon in Chancery Lane.

The other, quickening his pace, hastened after, caught sight of him, lost him again,—came once more within view in Fleet-street, and then pursued him till, after making his way through the crowds which thronged the new streets that had arisen from the ruins left by the great fire, the traveller turned sharp out of Cheapside to the left, and he who followed just reached the corner in time to see him enter a house about seventy yards down.

"So, so!" said the man who had pursued him; "now I understand. Here is the earth, is it?" and walking up to the door, he marked the number and the appearance well. Then slowly turning on his heel, he retrod his steps in meditative mood, and pausing here and there to look into a shop, or to make some little purchase where anything struck his fancy, he at length reached the mansion of Lord Alcester, on the other side of Holborn. The whole house was closed, as was the case with many of the dwellings even of persons differing widely with Lord Russell in political opinions; but the man we have mentioned walked straight in, and, ascending the stairs, entered a large and splendid room, where, with a book before him, sat Sir William Ellerton, reading by the faint light admitted through a chink in the shutters.

"Ah, Richard!—it is over," said the knight, as soon as the other entered; "I heard it an hour since. They say he died heroically."

"No; very calmly," replied Dick Myrtle; "I never thought to see a man go out of the world with so little of anything to talk about, except his composure. If it had not been for the axe, and the block, and the executioner, one might have thought, when he took off his coat, that he was going to lie down to sleep."

"May he sleep peacefully!" said Sir William; "a better or a wiser man never lived, or will live. Was there a great crowd?"

"Enormous," answered Dick Myrtle; "like young gudgeons fry round the piles of an old bridge. They seemed all very sorry, too, except one or two, amongst whom was your friend, Sir Frederick Beltingham."

"Curses upon the villain!" cried the old man, starting up. "Oh, if I had been there, I would have repaid him for some of his base acts to me and mine."

"I do not think he will commit many more to any one," answered Dick Myrtle; "he was somewhat saucy, and I knocked him down and left him. When I turned round I perceived the people, in hurrying away, had trod upon him; and the last thing I saw was the blood coming out of his mouth, as they carried him to a hackney-coach. He looked

to be quite dead, but I don't exactly know, for I did not stay to ask."

"God show him mercy!" said Sir William Ellerton, "he was as base a villain as ever lived; but I would not have body and soul condemned. It is strange! I was talking of him with Gertrude, not half an hour since, and she said she hoped he yet might live to repent. Those women are more forgiving than we are, Richard, except when they are afraid. She would fain persuade me that my shrewd cousin of Virepont has not had so much hand in my bad fortunes as I think. Odds life! I hope I have not done him wrong; and yet she seems very sure of it."

"It is likely, Sir William; you were always very quick, you know," replied Dick Myrtle. "Perhaps the young lady has seen the Earl, and he has explained matters."

"No, Dick, no," replied the old knight; "she has not seen him, I know; for she said she would give half Ellerton, were it hers to give, if she could find him out. The little dame was mighty mysterious, and would not tell me what she wanted, so I asked no more; but it is strange, Dick, to see the sucklings we have nursed upon our knees, get up to have their secrets from us, and be politic with those to whose coat-tails they hung but yesterday."

"Not so strange, Sir William," said Dick Myrtle, in a thoughtful tone; "so she wanted very much to know, did she? Well, he will be found one day, I doubt not. I wonder when this butchery work is to stop,—not I suppose till the informers have lied and betrayed enough to purchase a freehold of their lives. Heaven and earth! I would rather die a dozen times like Lord Russell, than live as long as Noah with a heart like that Howard."

The conversation then took a different turn, upon which we will not pause, but proceed to another scene, and another hour.

In a small lodging, in a small house, with the windows close shut, and some papers on the table, sat an old man in a brown coat without lace or ornament, a straight square-ended cravat, of somewhat coarse lawn, and a pair of large spectacles under his heavy over-hanging eyebrows. It would have been difficult for any one who did not know him very well, to recognise in that guise, or to trace in the anxious and worn look and quick and timid eye, the once proud, stern, collected Earl of Virepont. Yet there he sat, making notes for his own defence, at an imaginary trial. Terrified before, the news of Russell's execution, and the inexorable mood of the King, had almost changed fear into despair, and every sound heard in the streets, every step upon the stairs, made him

start and look up, and snuff the candles, that he might gaze at the door the better.

There was a step even then; and it approached his room. His hand shook sadly, and his lip quivered. The door opened, and the maid of the house put her head in, saying, "A young lady wishes to see you, Mr. Grant."

"Heaven and earth!" murmured the Earl; "I trust Emmeline has not had the madness to come; but Francis promised not to——"

But while he thus muttered, without answering the girl's implied question, a fair and beautiful hand pushed the door gently open, and one of the loveliest faces and forms he had ever beheld stood before him. He gazed at her, full of astonishment. When last he had seen those features, four years before, the earliest graces of womanhood were upon them, and now they were matured in beauty—fuller in loveliness, but not less fresh. There was the difference of seventeen and one-and-twenty; but still she was not to be mistaken. There was none like her. It was Gertrude Elerton!

"Gertrude!" he exclaimed, in strong surprise; "Gertrude!"

"Yes," she answered, with a faint and timid smile; then turning to the maid, she added, in a firmer tone, "this is the gentleman I wanted. You may go."

The Earl sank into his seat, and gazed at her with anxious eyes, till the woman was gone, and the door closed.

"What is it you seek, Gertrude?" he said in a voice low almost to indistinctness. "Why do you come here?—you would not betray me, I am sure."

"Not for the world," she answered, coming near him, and laying her hand on his: "we were once great friends,—you used to love me once."

"And so I do—and so I do," cried the Earl; "I will do anything you ask me, Gertrude. I love you well, indeed I do, my little Gertrude; but oh, you should not have come here at this moment of terrible anxiety. Whatever you seek, whatever you have to ask, you——"

"I ask nothing," replied Gertrude; "I seek nothing but to give you comfort—to lessen the anxiety of this terrible time—to take it away, perhaps, for ever. Look here, what I have brought you;" and sitting down beside him, she drew from her bosom a small roll of papers. "Here is a letter," she continued, "which, from what Henry has told me this evening, you have been long seeking. I think it may be the cause of your alarm. There, take it—destroy it—have no more fears."

The Earl stretched forth his hand and took it, but sat gazing at her, as if in doubt and amazement. "What! no conditions?" he said at length.

"None!" answered Gertrude; "and I can now assure you, for I have asked, that no copy has ever been taken.—Hark, there is a sound—destroy it quick. No;—it is nothing."

The Earl ran his eye hastily over the letter, read the few words at the end, twisted it up and put it to the candle. In an instant the fire had it, and in another it was ashes.

The old man cast his arms round the beautiful girl's neck, and wept like a child.

"Here is one letter more," said Gertrude, giving him the short note which he had written to appoint the time of Lord Russell's visit; "it were better to burn that too, though it is of less importance."

The Earl looked at it, but merely tore it, saying, "That matters little; but what have you there besides?"

"Nothing of importance at present," replied Gertrude; "it is a letter of old times which can be spoken of hereafter, when all that has happened to-night is forgotten."

"Yet let me look at it," said the Earl; "you shall have it again, doubt not."

"I do not in the least," answered Gertrude, giving it to him; "but remember, I do not ask you to look at it now."

"What has passed to-night can never be forgotten," said the Earl, stretching forth his hand to the inkstand as soon as he had read the words he had formerly written; "now as well as any time, my Gertrude:" and with a hand which trembled with manifold emotions, he wrote upon the paper, "All that this letter contains I confirm and promise.—Virepont;" and returning the letter, he held open his arms to her, saying, "Come to my heart, my child. You have given me life; let us bury in oblivion faults on both sides, for there have been such; and forgetting the last four years, remember but this night."

Gertrude embraced him weeping; and sitting down by his side, she told him how she had been visited in the middle of the day by a faithful friend to her father, who told her that he knew she wished to see the Earl of Virepont, and that if her visit portended no evil to him, he would lead her to his dwelling that night; and how she had divined who it was that had sent the letter to Lord Russell, thinking himself bound to do so when he found it in a packet of other papers; and how she had gone to Mr. Whitaker the lawyer that night, and questioned him till she had satisfied herself no copy had ever been made; and then how she had come thither at once, without doubt or hesitation.

Her hand was still clasped in that of the Earl, and there were tears of tenderness in the old man's eyes such as he had not shed for years, when there was a step upon the stairs. But the Earl started not now; the assurance of safety was fresh upon him; and when, with an anxious look, Lord Francis entered, he found her whom he best loved, sitting side by side with his father, and happiness on the countenance of each.

It were very needless, methinks, to tell all that followed. Here let it end.

THE END.

